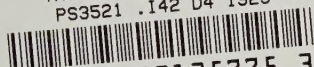


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# *The Devil is a Woman*



ALICE MARY KIMBALL

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*The Devil is a Woman*

FROM THE  
BORZOI POETRY LIST

*Collected Poems*

by A. E. COPPARD

*Travelling Standing Still*

by GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

*Poetry of the Orient*

edited by EUNICE TIETJENS

# *The Devil is a Woman*

ALICE MARY KIMBALL



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1929

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## NOTE

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## *The Devil is a Woman*

OH, LORD, I always said it wasn't needful  
For men to carry on the way they do:  
Sneaking to lodge conventions where their wives  
Can't watch to see what devilment they're up to,  
Or buying jewelry and handsome furs  
For painted Jezebels, when their own daughters  
Need decent-looking shoes and hats  
To get themselves good husbands and providers.  
They are black liars, men are, when they say  
They have to sow wild oats and misbehave.

Old Pardon Janes that passed away last night  
Alone, in a dark farmhouse, in a blizzard,  
Has proved to all the world a man may be  
As good as any pure, God-fearing woman  
If he can find the gimp to conquer sin  
Instead of chasing after it, hotfoot.

There is a smile across his worn-out face,  
The kind of smile the Christian martyrs wore  
As flames run up their limbs or lions et 'em.  
In the spare room he lies, banked up with flowers,

Geraniums, begonias, and callas,  
The Ladies of the Aid Society  
Snipped off their house plants. The remains  
Look nice, if I say so that hadn't ought to.  
There hasn't been a neater laid-out corpse  
In Grandview County since I can remember.

His fingers twine  
Around the pitchfork that he used to carry  
To pick up things with and to open doors with  
Because, when he was young, he swore an oath  
Solemn, upon the scripture of St. Paul,  
Never, so help him, would he ever touch  
A woman, or a thing a woman touched.

Seems kind of queer  
I should have been the one to close his eyes  
And wash his body for the burial,  
I, that once had a wedding veil  
Laid out across the bed to marry him,  
I, that was the last woman  
He ever spoke to.

I s'pose good old Mis' Janes that's gone to Heaven  
Was satisfied to see the way he died.  
It done high credit to her influence.

## II

THE Janes men was the kind that live in cities  
Because their acts won't stand their neighbors' eyes.  
They sprung from Jethro Janes,

An early settler of Grandview County,  
A carpenter whose houses are still standing,  
Smart, but a fiddler and an infidel  
That read Tom Paine to his sick, nervous wife;  
And Pardon's father was a chip of Jethro,  
A doctor who'd been known to give  
Pamphlets by Ingersoll instead of pills.

There was a nurse he took out on his cases,  
No better than she'd ought to be, I guess,  
And poor Mis' Janes, a meek-faced, noble woman,  
But doleful as a hearse with all her troubles,  
Cried day and night. She shed tears in the cooking,  
They sizzled on the flats when she was ironing.  
She held her head once in the water tub  
( 'Twas zero weather, too, in February)  
And he stood by, laughing, as hard as nails.  
When she saw 'twould only give him pleasure  
If she should drown and leave him to his wallow  
She popped it out. She named her baby Pardon.  
" O God, have mercy on the sin-soaked souls  
Of all the black-sheep, woman-chasing Janeses,"  
She used to pray so loud that we could hear her  
On nice June days we went meandering  
Up Peaked Hill to pick wild strawberries;  
And then would come a roaring and a cursing  
Of old Tom Janes a-jawing back at her.

Alone and single-handed, Mis' Janes blocked  
The flowing of bad blood. Her son grew up  
The first of all the tribe bearing his name  
Fit for a sweet young girl to be alone with.

The present corpse and I kept company  
Five years or more after his folks died off.  
“ You are a sensible, good woman, Susan,  
So will you be my wife? ” says he, at last.  
’Twas not to be. ’Twas not God’s will, it seems.

Our wedding day was set.  
The month of May it was, with orchards white,  
And a real pretty moon.  
The night before  
Came a loud shout and knocking at the door.  
“ That’s an unheard of thing,” says I,  
Waking. The clock struck twelve.  
Again that rattling and hollering.

I kicked into my slippers, scratched a light,  
Covered my nightgown with a crazy-quilt,  
And hurried out. A voice was saying:  
“ There’ll never be a wedding  
That I’ll be groom to! ”

I stood within the door, the oil lamp flaring.  
“ I must be walking in my sleep,” thinks I.  
But there he was —  
As solid as the pillars on the porch,  
Real as a hen-coop or a cellar-door,  
A tall, clean-favored man, hawk-faced and proud,  
With that high forehead that his father had,  
The bit-in lips he took from his sad mother,  
And great black eyes, lit up and fiery.

“ I’ve had a warning vision in the night,  
An angel led me down to hell,” he says.

"We've been mistaken," says he, "about Satan."  
"You've et too much and had a dream;  
Mince-pie, perhaps," says I, quietly.

"The devil is a comely, naked woman,  
These eyes have seen her," says he, covering them.  
"She looks like pictures in French magazines  
My father used to read behind the barn.  
She sits in hell,  
Directing its infernal, brimstone blazes  
With perks and flickings of her fan," he says.  
"She hasn't tail nor hoofs, but small, slim feet  
In shameless stockings and high-heeled red shoes.  
She has the way that women have  
Of knowing just what they're about," he says.  
"And when she simpers, little devil-girls  
Without a stitch of proper clothing on  
Prance and cavort 'round the dark lake of fire  
Where lost, tormented souls swim evermore.  
And so," he says, "you see, I've found you out."

"You've found out what?" I gasped, blushing and  
flustered.

"You're just like any woman," he says, knowing,  
"An emanation of old Nick herself.  
The cussedness of this world and the next  
Is all brewed by you petticoated shadows.  
You have deceived me, slick, but now that's over.  
At last I know you, Susan," he said, shrewdly,  
"You give me carnal feelings as you stand there!"

“ I don’t know what a carnal feeling is! ”  
I drew the crazy-quilt up tight  
Around my neck and arms. To save my life  
I couldn’t keep from crying like a baby.  
I was afraid and trembling; and I saw  
The blackness of a Bible in his hand,  
The whitewash of the moonlight on his face,  
And heard his stern young voice taking a vow.

He swore, God helping him, to make atonement  
For all his bad-behaving ancestors.  
“ I’ll never marry any female fiend,  
I’ll never eat a morsel cooked by woman,  
I’ll never wear a rag a woman sews  
Nor put upon my back shirts washed by woman,  
Nor touch a thing a woman’s hands have touched,  
Not so much as a door-latch! ” So he swore.

The truth was too outlandish to be told.  
I kept a cheery smile and shut my mouth  
And tried to look at the bright side of things.  
“ He jilted you for what he thought was right,  
Not for a feather-headed, flippety jade,”  
I told myself — and there was comfort in it.

After he left me sobbing on the porch  
He never spoke to womankind again.  
He got as starved and skinny as a beanpole,  
His lips thinned down and soon was lost to sight.  
He scared pack-peddler women half to death  
And screamed at little girls that climbed his fences.  
Why, he’d have left his head behind  
Sooner than he’d forget to take his hayfork.

He lifted latches with it, histed parcels  
That women clerks had tied, to bother him.  
“ That is old Pitchfork Janes, and he is love-cracked,  
His girl gave him the mitten years ago.”  
So he was pointed out to summer boarders.

But still folks hereabouts respected him,  
Knowing that if he was a mite peculiar  
He still had character and could be trusted.  
He wasn't anybody's fool — not he.  
He made a living from his Jersey cows  
And paid his debts and went to church a Sunday.  
He took along a chair he'd made himself  
So'st not to have to use the pews  
Women had vilified by sitting in.  
He had the Janeses' gift for gab and writing.  
Twice he was sent to represent the town:  
Once, when the porcupines was chewing corn-cribs  
His work put through the hedgehog bounty law.  
Again, he fought a bill for woman suffrage.

### III

THE remains was found  
At ten o'clock last night. I'd put out the cat  
And had a hot brick all het up for bed  
When in burst Joel Fiddock through the door —  
“ Mis' Binney,” says he, shaking,  
“ Old Pitchfork Janes is dead and maybe murdered! ”  
I called up Asenath Chase that's coroner  
And horse doctor and undertaker, too,  
Down to the village. “ Sue Binney,” says he, snappish,

" I wouldn't go out on a night like this,  
Not if a senator or governor  
Had kicked the bucket. The northeast wind, Mis' Binney,  
Is sharpened like a knife for sticking pigs.  
And there's saw-filings in the blowing snow,  
And it will be thirty below, come midnight."

" Asenath," says I, stern,  
" Where is your duty to the dead? " I says.

" I'll do my duty when I get around to't."  
I could almost sniff the taint  
Of liquor on his breath over the wire.  
" Maybe it is murder, maybe not,  
But, anyway, 'twill be there in the morning —  
This nipping cold will keep the corpse all right."

" You'll leave him be  
Just as you'd leave the body of an animal?  
The Ladies of the Aid  
Will give you your come-uppance, I can tell you! "

" You tell the Aid  
To keep their shirts on," growled back Asenath.  
" You've routed me out of my sleep, Mis' Binney."  
He rung off. Central tried  
For twenty minutes of hard, steady ringing  
To get him back. She was as mad as I was.  
" Central," I says, " I'm going to shovel through  
To Pardon's house and see what's happened there.  
I wish you'd flax around and try to get  
The Ladies of the Aid out of their beds."

Well, Joel Fiddock, man-like, when the pinch came,  
Lit out for home, saying he couldn't stand it.

The old Janes place atop of Peaked Hill,  
Built by old Jethro Janes in 1810,  
As big and bleak as a hotel for spooks,  
Full of tall, empty rooms, with doors a-slamming,  
Warn't a great sight too cheerful, I can tell you,  
With that corpse in it.

There was the old man lying on the floor  
Face down. His bed, in Winter time,  
Was in the kitchen where the fire was,  
And he'd jumped out of it, 'twas plain to see,  
To jab at something. His pitchfork  
Was clutched in his right hand.

His neck was kind of twisted, so I saw  
His bird-beak nose and eyes a-bunging out,  
Scairt, but determined, with that scornful smile  
That told of evil spurned, we found out later.  
The storm had broke a window. The snow,  
A-roaring in, had drifted over him  
As if to draw a lamb's wool coverlet  
Over the half-froze, goose-fleshed arms and limbs  
That stuck out from his cotton-flannel nightgown.  
'Twas like a nightmare I had once  
About a dreadful toadstool in the woods  
That changed into a man and followed me.

If folks hereabouts  
Didn't depend on me to take the lead  
I might have run; but, looking out the window,  
A-bobbing through the night like lightning bugs,

I saw the lanterns of the Aid a-coming.  
First, Sarah Fiddock bust in, red and winded,  
And, by and bye, Kate Crabtree and her husband,  
And Chet and Laura Tebbetts, Mis' Jane Ball,  
And Uncle Hannibal and Mis' Behorner,  
Stomping off snow, pounding their benumbed ears,  
Blowing their finger-tips with steaming breath,  
Saying we'd better 'phone around  
Come morning, and get bloodhounds.  
There ain't been such a to-do in the Aid  
Since that March night we all turned out because  
The teacher had a baby unexpected.

"The first thing is to solve the mystery,"  
Says Lonnie Crabtree, looking all about.  
"There ain't a black and blue spot on his body,  
Nor any sign of crime — but still it's queer —  
The way he lays — that fearful, loony stare —"  
And I says back: "In a world made of men-folks  
Carts would be hitched in front of horses' noses  
Habitual. A pile of kindling  
Is what is needed at the present moment.  
The first thing is to feed the stoves red-hot  
And pump some water into the brass kittles,  
So'st we can have the wherewithal  
To fall to work."  
We soon was busy as a dam of beavers.

I've always felt  
For all my marrying of Rufus Binney,  
Who proved by his low life and drunkard's death  
He was no husband in the sight of God,

That in the spirit, Pardon Janes was mine.  
The Ladies of the Aid sensed how I felt  
And so withdrew and left me with the dead.

" There hasn't been a female in this house  
For thirty years! " 'Twas Sarah Fiddock's voice  
That boomed out from the chamber overhead  
Where she was rummaging in bureau drawers  
To see if he had laid his grave-clothes by.

" If there ain't been,  
This house is pizen-neat," says Mis' Behorner.  
" He must have spent his days and nights a-scrubbing.  
The floors are clean enough to eat a meal from.  
It's elbow grease and soap  
That bleaches boards like this."

" He must a-used strong lye to wash that woodwork;  
The paint is et away," says Laura Tebbetts.  
" Shelves all in order, closets apple pie,"  
Reported Kate. " The linen's spick and span;  
There ain't a grain of dust. I've dragged  
My handkerchief over the furniture."

" He didn't know good victuals  
From buckwheat chaff," pipes up Mis' Jane Ball, wasp-  
ish.

" I've been a-looking into crocks and cupboards.  
There ain't a scrap fit for a cat to gnaw on —  
A bag of nuts, a peck of small, hard apples,  
And graham crackers that would chop your tongue off.  
We've got to hustle 'round and bake a sparerib,

And kill a turkey and bring in mince pies  
If there's to be good eating for the mourners."

#### IV

"WELL, all is ended," thinks I, solemnly,  
Down in the kitchen, doing the last things  
I could do for him, ever.  
The granther's clock ticked and the fire sang,  
The blown snow piled above the window sashes,  
And I worked on until I heard a cackling,  
A loud, excited powwow of the Aid.  
They'd reached the attic, peeking everywhere,  
Going through chests and trunks and locked-up boxes  
Along their route, to see how he'd kep' house.  
Now, they'd found something, it was plain to hear.  
They called for Chet and Lon to come and boost.  
Thump, thump, it was a-whacking down the stairs,  
A long, black coffin that he had all ready.  
His burial suit was in it, folded spruce,  
Shirt and a necktie, shoes, and neat-darned socks,  
Packed painstaking in cedar twigs and moth balls.  
We dug them out to dress up the deceased  
And out fell a thick book. The poor remains  
Had kept a diary through all the years!

After we'd finished up, we set around  
And et some ham and eggs that Sarah Fiddock  
Had brought along with her, foresightedly,  
And read aloud the tale of what had passed.  
The morning light was gray as dishwater,  
But every page was wrote as plain as print.

" June, the 23rd of 1890 —

Kit Curleen rode her pony through a meadow  
Where I was raking and she tempted me,  
First I knew I was a-kissing of her  
Among the haycocks. But I come to.  
I grabbed a pitchfork and I threatened her,  
Saying: ' Foul harpy, go! You make tracks, quick! '   
And she lit out direct," he finished up.  
" I'll keep the pitchfork handy by, hereafter."

Well, we was shocked! Kit Curleen  
Was now Kate Crabtree, member of the Aid!  
We'd clean forgot her folks was low-down Irish  
That hadn't nothing and moved in from Nowhere,  
And how she used to ride over the hills,  
Her yellow curls a-boiling from her bonnet  
A-singing out to men-folks as she passed,  
And no good woman ever looked at her  
Till she was married safe and settled down  
To cooking meals and washing diapers.

" August, the 1st," I read out. " Cloudy weather.  
The Bemis heifer had a calf. Mis' Ball  
Went after blackberries in my pasture lot  
Dressed up so thin I couldn't help but see  
Right through her, as she passed behind the house.  
I'll turn the cross bull in the berry-patch  
To-morrow. That settles her, I guess! "

" You'd better skip it where it's personal,"   
Says Laura Tebbetts, and we all agreed.  
We come to 1922, March 1: " Showery. A thaw.  
Papared the kitchen with old newspapers."

“ Tuesday. Didn’t notice  
The papers was chock-full of women’s pictures  
Till they was grinning at me from the walls:  
A Spanish female on a cigarette ad,  
And spindly girls ’twas hoped would draw attention  
To ads for hosiery and silverware,  
And Sunday papers full of actresses  
And social belles. Ha! Ha! I’ve fixed them.  
I pasted big, white sheets of writing paper  
Over their giggling faces.”

“ Wednesday. The devil has laid siege.  
I woke up in the night. There was a crackling,  
Swishing of skirts, tapping of slipper heels.  
The squares of writing paper on the walls  
Were growing big and opening like doors.  
The women they were meant to cover up  
Stepped from them big as life.  
They minced and preened.  
The Spanish strumpet clicked her castanets.  
The trollop from the ad for silverware  
Beckoned and winked and showed off reprehensible.  
The baking-powder woman in her apron,  
A long-haired dancing woman dressed in beads  
And her immodest skin and not much else,  
A toothpaste minx with flashy teeth a-showing,  
And Aunt Jemima of the pancake ads,  
All formed a line just as the show-girls do.  
They jiggled round the table and the whatnot,  
And straight toward me.  
I grabbed the pitchfork. ‘ Demons! ’ I yelled.  
They went back where they came from, helter-skelter,

The doors shut after them. There was the wall  
Just as it had been."

"Thursday. Twice last night.  
They didn't shoo so easy as before."

And this year he was writing: "I need sleep.  
But they keep coming. New paper didn't help.  
I'll fight the good fight till I drop  
Dead in my tracks."

## V

THE puzzle of his death was now cleared up.  
There was a prayerful silence in the Aid.  
How few men-folks that we'd known intimate  
Would have held out as poor old Pardon did!  
They was dream-hussies that he wrote about  
But they was real to him, and that's the point,  
And he went down to death, contending with them.  
He was a hero, if there ever was one!

"But he was crazy as a loon," said Lonnie.

"Then let there be  
More craziness like his," says I, emphatic.  
Against the wall, there by the kitchen range,  
His pitchfork stood. I picked it up  
And took it to the spare room where he lay.  
I put it by him. He'll be buried with it.



*The Mating-Flight of*  
*Stasia Whitsett*





*The Mating-Flight of  
Stasia Whitsett*

I'VE SEEN fat Jersey cows, come breeding time,  
Take fences like light-leaping antelopes;  
I've read that penguins foot it over rocks  
Through fifteen hundred miles of frozen wastes,  
Gabbling as senseless as a sewing-bee,  
Hunting the only spot in the Antarctic  
They'll deign to have for love-making and nesting.  
Electric eels that feel the call to lay  
Set out, they say, for the Sargasso Sea.  
Well, when I ponder on the strange to-do —  
The wonders without end — and scandalous —  
Of Nature as she works in paper wasp,  
Ant, scorpion, cuttlefish and kangaroo,  
I jog my mind and say: "My stars above,  
There's Stasia Whitsett, too, over to Dorset."

No mammal that I've ever read about  
Took such outlandish tacks to bring forth young  
As Stasia — a noble-minded woman  
Descended from John Alden and Priscilla.  
There was nobody in my territory

So looked up to and praised by everybody,  
Even by those who didn't fling kind words  
Reckless as flowers of May — like Angie Cherry,  
Who boarded me and took half-pay in trade  
When I drove into Dorset on my route.  
You've heard of me, I guess. I'm Kate MacQuigg,  
A well-known character here in this county,  
Agent for anything you want to name,  
But my chief line is female beautifiers.

"Miss Stasia Whitsett passed the house to-day  
Walking afoot," Mis' Cherry said one noon.  
She laid the dinner on and we set down,  
We let our victuals stop our mouths a spell.  
Then Angie: "She wore two petticoats.  
I know it, for the sun was bright to-day  
And she passed by between me and the light.  
There warn't a thing to see. I looked partic'lar.  
Decent she is, from heel unto her head,  
Modest and neat. The new town hall  
Would step from its foundation on the Square,  
Yes, dance a jig on its gold cupola  
Before you'd see Miss Whitsett roll her stockings."  
"She's prob'ly human," Milton Cherry says,  
'Timid and faint, not hardly looking up  
From his heaped plate of beef and vegetables.

"Don't you go, now, insinuating 'round.  
The doctor says I shouldn't ought to hear  
Coarseness at meals. It hurts me terrible."  
A tear plopped into Angie's cambric tea,  
A tear splashed on the crust she was a-crunching.

She had dyspepsia, poor Mis' Cherry did.  
Bit by bit she cooked  
Her life away — and all for other folks.  
She *was* a good cook. Took no comfort in it.  
One of the sad and pain-racked sisterhood  
That Lydia Pinkham loved, poor Angie was.

"She might be human. You can never tell,"  
Milt Cherry mumbled, with his eyes cast down.  
Meek, doe-like eyes, but kind of mulish, too;  
Old, gray, and tired.

"Human! That word's an insult  
The way you men-folks use it," she complained.  
"There's just one thing you mean by it and that  
Ain't fit to be said out in a good home  
Before your wife. 'Tain't true of Stasia.  
You've passed the Whitsett place  
And heard her voice, pure as a seraph's, singing  
'I Need Thee,' 'Draw Me Nearer, Blessed Lord.'  
It comes as natural to Stasia Whitsett  
To set a good example to this town  
As it comes natural to *hens* to *lay*.  
'Tis in the blood for generations back.  
Too bad they're gone, the Whitsetts; all but Stasia."

"'Tis bad that such good stock should pindle out.  
The foreigners have all the babies, these days.  
It seems so when I pass the farms they've bought,"  
Says I; and says she, fierce:

"They ought to be prevented by the law,  
So Lawyer Spiller said, in a big speech.

Drove back to where they come from in a pack  
To clear a place for decent folks to stand on.  
But as for Stasia: Marrying ain't for her.  
There is that in marriage  
You couldn't think of Stasia stooping to:  
She is too dignified and elevated."

"I s'pose the foreigners are likely human  
And Stasia, too,"  
Milt Cherry let fall into his moustache,  
A brave moustache, yellow and crinkly-like.  
It curled twice over. He et under it.

"You dare to speak of her and foreigners  
In the same breath!" said Angie, rising gaunt,  
Mad as a hornet's nest that's been mowed into.

I sensed they'd had this quarrel on before.  
A creature that is glad or scared or mad  
Makes certain sounds; and if you know the brute  
And hear the sounds, you know about his innards.  
Angie hooked Milton by an advertisement  
And they'd been married thirty years or so  
And happy, too, I guess, as such things go.  
When deadness caked so solid at the Cherry's  
'Twas time to wade in with a drill and pick-axe  
And quarry out an air-hole, 'twas their way  
To have words over Stasia. "I'll lend a hand  
To ventilate," thinks I, a-joining in,  
And saying: "Spos'n I drive the Lizzie  
Up to the Whitsett house this afternoon  
And sell Miss Stasia a bright red lipstick?"

"I never thought to hear such brashness spoke  
Under my roof," said Angie, staring wild.

Says Milton, jumpy-like:

"Don't know's I'd go so fur as that — not quite."

"In the old burying ground on the back road  
Right on the land young Mariano bought  
To raise grapes on — and all for no good purpose —  
There is a sunken, slate, rain-eaten stone  
That marks the resting-place of the first Whitsett.  
I once scraped off the lichen and found this:  
'Do right — and let the chips fall where they may.'  
Such is the story of the Whitsett folk,  
Stasia included. Such righteousness  
Shall not be left to wither — not if I  
Can save it, with my beauty shop on wheels."

"When you run on like that," said Angie mournful,  
I don't know black from white or white from black.  
I'm all shook up and scrambled in my brain  
And can't make head nor tail of anything.  
Well for you, Kate MacQuigg, 'tain't witchcraft days  
In Salem. You'd been burned afore this.  
You look just like a witch — so lean and lank  
With peaked nose and sorrel hair a-flying,  
A-setting there, with those green, smiling eyes  
That don't tell all they know, not by a long shot.  
Them books you carry in your old black bag  
That you set up till midnight reading of  
'Tain't good you find in 'em, I'll bet a penny.  
Sometimes I think that God will say to me  
After I die and get called up for judgment:

' You hadn't ought to cooked for Kate MacQuigg.  
She didn't sell the Nello Beauty Products  
From farm to farm, as she made out to do.  
She rode on broomsticks with a stack of cats —  
She connived with the Devil on black nights.' ”

She dragged herself off then with shooting pains  
Racing like red-hot needles down her spine,  
Or so she said. Milt stomped off to the barn.  
He kept his postage-stamp collection there  
To kind of pore over when work was done.

## II

THERE Stasia stood  
Framed by the fine old doorway: Slim and frail,  
Thirty she was, to say the least of it,  
Spindled up strong to faculty and will.  
Tight lips, they'd nip all nonsense in a minute. . . .  
As pink and pungent as a hillside apple,  
Thought I, but who would be the man to see it?

She brought poundcake and yellow rhubarb wine  
Out to the sightly porch and down we sat.  
My eye scooped in the sad, crow-colored dress  
She wore in memory of old Judge Whitsett,  
And wheat-gold hair, three shining ropes of it  
Wound tight around her proud head, sensible,  
And eyes dark-blue and grave and inward-looking,  
Color of larkspur with a bleak light on it.

The while we talked of local history,  
She pointed out a homestead in the valley,

Painted with maple-mists in spring-color,  
All tender curves, one leaping to the other.

" 'Twas mine once, but I thought it best to sell it,  
A Dante Mariano signed up for it —  
How sweet his trees are blossoming! " cried Stasia.

" Yankees who rave on spring and scenery  
Are mad or else in love," I reasoned out.  
" Now who's the man if not the foreigner?  
Not Bertram Wiggam or unweaned Joe Grout,  
As lifeless, both, as half-thawed grasshoppers,  
Nor Hiram Ball, retired traffic cop,  
Nor Peavy Jarves, the fungoid undertaker.  
The men-folks who have means and family  
Have been picked over like a dish-pan sale,  
And chased, till each is standing on one toe,  
Uneasy as a chick on a hot griddle.  
Her property — not near enough of it  
For one of them to drag her off for it,  
A few old farms, with buildings gone to seed,  
Thin-grassed and all side-hill.

" If food were scarce as males for Stasia Whitsett  
Her stomach would be ruined with hot pies  
Brought by good ladies in a daily basket."

So pondering, I spread my beautifiers  
On Windsor chairs and antique Boston rockers.

### III

" MY people never rouged. No more can I.  
We never had to be a family

That leaned on style and show and like of that.  
Dorset would have a fit and fall into it  
If I should be a flapper for my pleasure.  
I'm in enough hot water, as it is.  
You'll sell me only castile soap to-day."

"How come?" asked I, as saucy as a jay.

"No harm for you to know the straight of it.  
Since I sold off my farm to the Italian  
Hard feeling has been piling up in Dorset.  
It's riffraff, mostly. Enoch Spiller leads it.  
A few of our best people back him in it.  
Cassius J. Grout, our man of property,  
Says aliens, by and large, plant dynamite  
And waylay payrolls and on top of that  
Are radical as Sacco and Vanzetti.  
Good Doctor Pringle of the Seminary  
Says frankly I am going far too far.  
The D.A.R. is mad as a wet cat.  
They wanted the old place of Lisha Whitsett  
To rig up for a show-place and a tea-shop."

Said I: "You've put it to a better use!"  
Her slim nose pointed down into the valley.

"It doesn't shelter relics of the dead!"

I pricked my ears up as a naturalist.  
Was this a forest song, a mating caper?  
The silver leap where wall of water foams,  
The iris of a giddy hackle-feather,

The call of gold-flecked cats from jungle homes?  
And would it save the Whitsett chromosomes?  
Unique in Nature was the way of it.

*" If that boy makes a promise, he will keep it.*  
I have respect for his stability,  
His sterling thrift, his constant industry.  
*He saved two thousand on one apple crop.*  
He's an uplifting and soul-stirring singer,  
He'd be a fine improvement for our choir,  
Although I'm told he is a Catholic.  
The Grouts say worse." Her lips formed: " Anarchist."  
" No word of truth in that . . . although  
I don't hold views against folks, as some do."

She burst to flame now like a crackling bush.

" No soul is left since father passed away  
Who isn't scared by fiery crosses burning,  
But there is still a Whitsett who loves justice! "

#### IV

" You plan to be Joan of Arc to Dorset?  
You'll have a set-to, then, with Lawyer Spiller.  
He hankers to be made the town grand juror  
And then to be a public prosecutor.  
There's power in his bobbing Adam's apple.  
What power do you hope to play against it? "

She flared up hot: " The women's clubs of Dorset.  
I've worked in them for years, I know their power.

I can depend till death on Pansy Lyford,  
The strong-willed founder of the Civic Circle;  
And Emma Leete, the Temperance Union Fighter;  
And Amy Treat, head of the Culture Circle;  
The chairman of the Bird Club, Jane Proudfoot,  
So white-haired and so wise and scholarly,  
And dean of women at the Seminary.  
She helped to form my girlhood character."

We nodded each to each and solemnly  
While spring winds carried scents and sounds of that  
Which is no better than it ought to be.

"I haven't one small mite of relish for it,  
Town office, county politics, and fighting.  
To tell the truth, it sets my nerves a-scringing. . . .  
But more by far will yet be asked of me.  
A strong belief requires suffering.  
I won't be the first Whitsett who has learned that.  
A world so far advanced  
I couldn't suffer in it, for my principles,  
Would be no place that I should want to live in."

Into the silence flowed the bright May weather.  
Young Mariano far off down the valley  
Sang as he poisoned moth and caterpillar,  
And quaintly fell the earnest voice of Stasia:

"Sh — hark . . . The wind is south. . . .  
Hear that pure voice. Golden, I guess you'd call it.  
It's sweet to hear that singer these soft days.  
If miracles do happen in our times —

And even a bookwormy naturalist  
Like you, Mis' Kate MacQuigg, can't prove they  
don't —

He was God's messenger the day he came  
To buy my land to put his grapevines on.  
When he had gone and walked off up the hill  
Singing a winsome air and stepping jaunty  
He'd left a mission in this empty house.  
He'd cleansed me of the error of the rest  
Whose influence goes out like blackening frost,  
Sounded a trumpet-call to bring me back  
To courage and my duty as a Whitsett."

So here's her tale — and pieced, I do confess  
By what I know of animals and Whitsetts.

V

JUDGE Whitsett's coffin was borne to its grave  
A year ago last March, Stasia began.  
The sacrifice she'd lived by since a child  
Slid out from under, leaving her bewuzzled,  
And what was even worse, the sense of God  
She'd counted on to bolster her had vanished.  
She felt Him no more in the first arbutus,  
Heard Him no more in silver twilight thrushes,  
And when she looked out at her bed of tulips  
Stiff-bobbing in May wind, they might have been,  
For all the sense of God she got from them,  
Made by a milliner of colored paper  
And stuck on overnight for a mean joke.  
Oh, sick and gone, she felt, lugubrious.

A moulting turkey in a drizzling rain  
Was chipper by comparison, I guess.

Well, in her misery, the rural phone  
Kept ting-a-linging, and a hectoring man  
Said he would give no name except that he  
Was Grand Exalted Goblin of the Lodge  
She'd seen parading by in hoods and sheets.  
Something like that, she couldn't catch it, quite.  
Twenty feet high he sounded, barrel-lunged:

"How long will you hold back your influence  
From white folks who are banded to trace down  
The plotters in our midst?" he asked, accusing.  
"Black deeds afoot go back to Civil War times.  
The Booth that murdered Lincoln was a Jew.  
Harding was poisoned by a German cook.  
The Pope has bought a farm not far from Akron  
To make his stronghold while he runs for king.  
His henchmen are in Dorset burying arms  
And living like low animals this minute."

"That doesn't sound horse-sensible to me.  
I'd need strong proof of it," says Stasia, back.

"When the old stock is callous and thick-hided  
To goings-on that call for necktie parties,  
When the U. S. caves in, gnawed through the heart  
By worms and falls, corrupt, as Rome did,  
When all good women, and yourself, included,  
Are dragged off to a fate I can't describe  
Over a party line and to a lady,  
You'll have your proof," the Goblin growled, indignant.

" You might be good enough to bring your proof  
A day or two before the country's ruin."

Her voice was tart and chilled as frozen pickles.  
But far from ringing off, the goaded Goblin  
Roared out and said: " I'll ante up some facts:

" From where I sit my eyes soak up just now  
A sickening scene. It turns my stomach over.  
Eyetalian kids carousing in the sun  
And not a stitch of clothes on one of them!  
A little huzzy in her birthday suit  
Has three hats on, one piled on top of tother.  
I see two boys I'll not depict to you.  
There are no proper words in which to do it.  
But I will say they have a contest on  
That's not so extra modest at this moment."

" I'll have my agent see Mis' Mariano,  
She doesn't make obscenery on purpose."

And now she figured who the voice belonged to.  
'Twas Lawyer Spiller's windbag letting off.

" You cannot reason," said he, " with a viper.  
They've got an arbor up in their back yard,  
The vines grow over it so thick and heavy  
The lodgemen with their glasses can't peek through  
To keep an eye on brawling Sunday doings.  
I can of course imagine what takes place  
As plain as though I was right on the spot.  
But that won't stand in law — and evidence  
Is what we want and what we're going to get."

"Of all outlandishness!" said Stasia, shocked.

"We write it down, just who goes in and out.

An Irish widow who pays rent to you

Is thick as thieves with all of these Eytalians.

And there's a Polack girl a-down the road,

She has been seen to turn in at the wops',

And wheeling cheerfully her year-old baby —

Although she isn't married

She's just as fat and happy as she'd been

If she'd behaved herself," the Goblin said.

"She rocks the young one brazen in the yard,

She croons and drools to it, while autos pass.

When your great-aunt Cecile slipped up like that,

'Twas well-known at the time, she killed herself.

She pounded up the vinegar cruet

And ate it down to the last piece," he said.

"I know I speak of what ain't to be spoke of

To show the gulf that lies 'twixt swine and white folks."

"But these are private matters, are they not?

Houses are castles, father used to say."

"A fallacy," the Goblin came back, hot.

"What is the need of any private life?

To keep indecency from being caught!

The U. S. would be better off without it.

Now here is why I come to call you up:

We're moving on the undesirables,

One pack, though, at a time, and that swept clean.

And scientific method is our watchword.

We're sending you binoculars by mail —

Your porch is so high up you'll get a view.  
You watch the place you've let the wops in on.  
You save up what you see for courts of law.  
'Twon't edify you much, but we expect it.  
If you are friend of foe, we want to know it."

"The Whitsetts never pry," said Stasia, high-toned.

## VI

SLOW-moving blue on amber-lighted grass  
Cloud-shadows sailed across the happy hills,  
And Stasia saw them as a ghost might see,  
A dry and lonesome seeing, till her eyes  
Spied out a man afoot, a speck, ant-size  
And coming toward her on a cross-lots path.  
"I s'pose he's from the lodge," she thought, alarmed.  
She'd shoo him out at once and snap the lock.  
"Never touch pitch," Judge Whitsett used to say.

"Better to know who 'tis." Binoculars —  
She'd dropped them sudden like a red-hot doughnut —  
Were lying 'twixt the bright-tailed crystal bird  
Made by the glass-blowers of long ago,  
And a biography of Lyman Abbott  
That set upon the parlor center table.  
She'd dusted round the object every day  
Suspecting that 'twould dynamite her dead,  
Waiting for promptings of His Guiding Light  
To say if 'twas her duty to ignore it  
Or look through it, direct, and know the worst.  
She grabbed it now from off the polished marble  
As nervous as a witch to get it focused.

A smiling youth, sun-browned and pleasant favored,  
Was sauntering as though he owned the earth,  
Or had, leastwise, a thrifty nest-egg by  
So'st not to have to scrabble round, hard put.  
He watched a goldfinch fly, now high, now low:  
*He uses his two eyes. That's to his credit.*  
He sniffed chokecherry boughs along the way:  
*He takes his nose to walk and most folks don't.*  
He tipped a yellow lady-slipper up  
By one forefinger and looked down at it,  
Friendly and interested — taking time.

A hunger to be petted and made over  
By someone all her own to love and do for  
Brought tears she couldn't help but be ashamed of,  
And when she looked again, electric shocks  
Leaped up behind her heart, or p'raps her stomach.

He knocked. She stiffened like the wife of Lot,  
She shoved herself along by power of will,  
So tiny beetles push dark clumsy loads,  
And said: " Good morning, sir. Do take a chair,  
Here, on the porch." *Don't ask a strange man in.*  
*It can't be told just what he'll up and do.*

A pleasant, velvet voice: " You not know me,  
Your tenant, Mariano. Raise the apple,  
The pear, the grape — "  
His words were lost in hammering and pounding  
And, mortified, she saw, 'twas not the engine  
Chopping the wood-blocks in the sugar-place,  
But her own circulation hurrying.

(This isn't quite the way she worded it.)  
Oh, there was Milton Cherry and his wife  
A-rattling by in their old, mud-specked buggy  
With Angie's neck a-craning like a goose.

Would it haul in her looks, so changed and crazy?  
It would be spread all over town by nightfall.  
*A woman all alone can't be too careful.*  
"I must control myself or die," she thought.  
Her words dropped now, a cold stream from a height:  
"My lawyer has had charge of all my business.  
I never meet the people on my farms."

Young Mariano didn't take the hint  
Or move to go. He'd come to her, direct,  
To make a deal to buy the orchard farm  
Where he lived with his married brother, Tony.

"I want my own wife. My own boys and girls.  
A little stone house — pretty sunny hill.  
Not Italy, but good. I make the money.  
Big handsome girl to marry.  
Much food, wine, health. Fine feast on Sunday,  
And sing the song by night with the victrola.  
What more you want?" asked Dante Mariano.

"You think you'll make the payments regular?"  
She asked severe. It couldn't help —  
Luigi, the older brother, rich — two fruit stores,  
A house with parquet floors, three bathrooms, eh?  
Big shiny car go seventy miles an hour,  
His son to college. Pay ten dollar  
For just one lesson on the violin.

In Italy so hard to get the money.  
Two little acres on the farm near Naples.  
"The scenery was real nice?" asked Stasia,  
Crawling from out her hole the smallest mite.  
"Bella, bella, bellissima!" he cried.

"I don't know's I could deed away that land  
For any money," Stasia said, but knowing  
'Twas no more'n right the boy should own his home.  
"One of my ancestors, Elisha Whitsett,  
Is buried there. He fought with Washington."

He laughed with sound white teeth and waved his hands.  
"A hero's grave! Bella! Oh fine, Oh nice!"  
He'd mow the grass, he'd plant a rose bush on it,  
Red for the strong, brave heart, and in the spring  
The grapes would blossom and the sweet smells float  
Over the spot the great man lay asleep.

Said Stasia, touched, but blushing, too, and guilty,  
Because Great Grandpa Whitsett died from rum  
(He got froze on a load of hay while drunk):

"No scent is sweeter than the grape in flower.  
It makes me giddy, just to think of it.  
Most folks don't like fine smells as you and I do.  
A nice smell is a good, clean, moral pleasure.  
It isn't wickedly extravagant,  
It never leads to evil and wrongdoing.  
'Tis sad that can't be said of everything.  
I've laid myself out to fit up a house  
Where noses can be joyful every minute.  
Maybe you'd like to come inside and smell it."

## VII

"SOME of my choicest scents are in the attic."

*Why, he could carry me upstairs so easy —*

*This is my silly day. I wish 'twas over.*

*And I was sunk in sleep under the covers.*

She lifted, delicate, her greyhound nose,

Picked up a wisp of heliotrope sachet

(She'd hung a bag of it in granther's clock)

'And higher up she caught a sniff of catnip,

Sage, pennyroyal, peppermint, and dill.

"That's from the tiptop of the house," she told him.

"I keep old-fashioned herbs hung from the rafters

And bags of scent from each of my four bedposts

To sweeten up my bedroom when the wind blows."

*Don't mention beds or bedrooms to a man.*

*Don't speak of stockings or of underwear,*

*And let no word of nightgowns pass your lips.*

Her dear dead mother salted this thought deep.

Dim gold rays darted through the attic gusk.

She opened a carved chest, took out a dress.

She held it to his nose. "Smell this," she said.

His dark eyes caught her blue ones and struck fire.

His hand was like a magnet drawing hers.

She thought she'd faint and fall into his arms.

"It's lavender from England," she said, shaky.

"This queer old bonnet danced with Lafayette."

He laughed out softly: "He the hero, hey?"

He bury on my land? Red rose for him?"

"You ought to know our country's story better,"

Said Stasia, cool and schoolmarm-wise by now.

"Two hundred years of it I've stacked away  
In orris-root and fragrant Paris soap,  
Attar of roses, balsam, citradora,  
In these old trunks and boxes here before you.  
There is a lesson in that rough old cradle.  
You see that gash? 'Twas from a tomahawk.  
A painted Indian hurled it through a window.  
The wife of old Lish Whitsett grabbed a kettle,  
'Twas spluttering with red-hot hasty-pudding.  
She chased him off, yelling so vigorous  
The savages for miles were terrified.  
She shot wolves with that flintlock over there.  
She buried seven babies and raised twelve."

"Bully for gran'ma! She the grand old peach."

"I s'pose you have your future wife picked out? "  
Said Stasia anxiously. He shook his head.  
"I love all pretty girl — black eye, brown eye!  
But wife — for wife the silky, golden hair,  
The sorrowful blue eye, the sad, kind face.  
The young girl — *no!* Wife help save up the mon,  
Bring up the boy, the girl, keep the fine house.  
You find me wife — leetla like you, Mees Wheetseet! "

"Your compliment is most polite," said Stasia.

She showed the young man now throughout her house.  
He sniffed the neat-scrubbed soap-and-water smell  
Of kitchen floors, and shelves of willowware,  
The sweet-grass sewing basket, balsam pillows,  
The potpourri of roses in a jar.

He breathed with gusto, and he spoke admiring  
Of fresh clean lime scents of the whitewashed cellar.  
'Twas there a black man spent a night in terror —  
It was a station of the underground.

“ Your folks pay the police? Not scare, perhaps? ”

“ My people had no fear except of wrong.”

“ Bravo! Like opera! ” laughed Mariano.

He ought to put his thoughts in better English.  
She'd be a sister to him, she would teach him.  
“ You'll get your farm — on liberal terms,” she told  
him.

He kissed her hand as natural as a bird flies.  
She watched him from the back porch, faint and slimsy,  
And saw him cut across the orchard lot,  
While towers and minarets of petal-lace  
Closed over him and hid him from her sight.

A sound came bubbling back. 'Twas Traviata.  
As giddy as a bobolink and sweeter.  
“ That's as refined and good, uplifting music  
As ever I have heard in the Chautauqua.  
His ways are quaint, but he has noble feelings.  
His family goes back to Rome and Cæsar,  
I make no doubt, for father used to say  
That gentle manners never came from upstarts.

“ Oh, wonder of the world! If hollyhocks  
Should pop up through a snowdrift in December,

And open wild and red before my eyes,  
It couldn't hearten me as that boy has.  
*Perhaps God in His wisdom put His culture*  
*In Italy as in our own New England! "*  
She dived for the Encyclopedia.  
The thought was new and real exhilarating.  
It came down on her like a bolt from Heaven.

## VIII

It brought back swift the sense of God she'd lost.  
The Lord was her companion. Now great days  
Bloomed whitely as the foaming cherry trees.  
The while she read in her Britannica  
His spirit shook her like a willow leaf.  
Books on the art of Greece and Italy  
She drew from out the public library.  
O, naked sculptured forms! Of purity  
Purer by far than bodies clothed could be!

Wherever duty called her — in the house,  
Wood lot or barns, or in the chicken-shed —  
The air was luminous with pulsing wings.  
Transplanting cucumbers and lettuces  
From her cold-frames to brown earth, newly spaded,  
She felt the music of infinity  
Beyond the reach of any human ear.

Before the curly-maple secretary  
Where Whitsetts long since gone had written diaries  
One night sat Stasia, rapturous and strong,

While birch-logs sputtered spicy and burned dim,  
Putting in frost-fine filigree of ink  
The record of her spiritual experience.  
A higher power pushed her hand along,  
She had no need to prod her mind or think.  
She felt inspired, born anew, it seemed.  
Her words popped out in verses, like a hymn.

*" My garden has become remote and strange.  
Its radiance is not of sun or moon.  
My larkspur is a blue, unearthly flame.  
The purity of curving lily stem  
Is Sign from Thee, O high and tender Friend,  
As intimate as breath, yet universal.*

*" And Thou art love eternal,  
O, Thou art  
In sap of lilacs and swift-flying bird,  
In far stars dancing, in my leaping blood,  
In dearly-loved ones. Thou art multitude  
Yet one, and that enfolding harmony.*

*" The glow of other-worldly sunset light  
Lasts for a holy hour and slowly goes.  
My cornflowers are cornflowers once more  
And Everyday is in its place again.  
Yet not the same. Thy Bright Reality  
Thrust through the low-hung veil where Thou wert  
hid.  
Thy terror caught me and Thy splendor flared.  
As Lazarus, I rise up from the dead."*

She read it over. Then she drew a bath.  
She saw her body, as if under glass,  
The crystal water sheening over it.  
A thought came flashing: *Waste is wickedness.*  
Peculiar, the idea, in just this place.  
She blushed the color of a new tea rose.  
She got inside her blue silk negligee.  
Now tipsy and big-eyed with joyousness  
She rushed to lock the door and wind the clock.

She'd wished for weeks past when she went to bed  
She'd never wake to bitter, baffled days.  
Now she could hardly wait for morning sun.  
She put the cat out, set some beans to soak,  
And just was starting upstairs with her candle  
When rat-tat-tat, the knocker sounded, churlish,  
And Stasia answered, sad and chopfallen.  
How mean that high, exalted hours of vision  
Should always be walked in on by the neighbors!

## IX

THE door she opened: a thin cautious crack.  
A man's big shoe burst through and lammed it open.  
Into her muslin-curtained sitting room  
Lit softly by a pinkish springtime moon,  
Burst men in sheets with rough and noisy stamping.  
They brushed her off as though she was a fly,  
They closed in on her in a wolfish circle.  
She felt eyes spearing and hot anger rushing.  
The air was pudding-thick with spite and threatening.  
She lifted up her arms to beat it off.

But God was there in that alarming hour,  
For soon her nose caught floating from the leader  
A scent which tagged him neat and accurate.  
“ No Whitsett ever has to knuckle down  
To anyone who smells of salted peanuts.  
This is no monster, but Attorney Spiller.”  
She was as calm, now, as a cucumber.  
The sense of Him upbore her and she said:

“ There was no need to wear your wives’ clean sheets.  
Washday is burdensome enough as ’tis.  
Take off your masks. It’s hot and close to-night.  
We’ll talk like neighbors. Never in this house  
Shall people act in ways they can’t own up to.”  
She lit the big lamp on the center table,  
Her smart ears caught the squeaking of new shoes.  
They’d put on their best footgear and store clothes  
To lay the law down to Judge Whitsett’s daughter.

The spectres teetered awkward and unsure.  
A fat one started to peel off his sheet.  
The Goblin gouged him with determined elbow,  
And strode out to the middle of the room.  
He banged the table, too, peremptory,  
And gathered up his power of lung to boom:

“ Do you suppose we mask because we like to?  
We plainly mask to save ourselves from slaughter.  
If you could know of men struck down like dogs  
While roaming through the night on perilous missions,  
And hear their orphans crying in their cribs,  
You’d not begrudge the robes that save our lives.

The ambushed fiends strike when we least expect it.  
Even from you we need to be protected.  
You talked this morning with a low-down plotter  
Who'd gladly stick his knife into our ribs."

Inside the sheets was rumbling and roaring  
That seemed to give off heat like scorching lava.

He flipped a clove-pink from a glass of water,  
He drank a gulp to put his throat in order.  
Poor Stasia, meanwhile, squeezed a word in edgewise:  
"Don't be like your old grandpa, Mr. Spiller.  
He gave away his farm, he was so sure  
Of what turned out to be a loony mess —  
Jumped from the church-shed in a flapping robe  
On a great day set for the Second Coming.  
He thought all unbelievers would be burned  
And he be gathered to the heart of God.  
'Twas piteous he died without a cent,  
His back broke, though an Advent to the last.  
Don't throw away your life on a mistake."  
It stunned him to be known through his disguise,  
But soon his gift of gab came sneering back:

"You've just as good as said that I am crazy.  
I'm crazy, hey? Millions of hard-boiled men  
Are crazy just as I am and these boys.  
Tough-headed business men: just try to fool 'em!  
Lawyers, too. Try to slip something over 'em.  
Could governors be batty in the bean?  
Could candidates for President be idiots?  
Could U. S. senators be mad as loons?

The craziness I speak to you is down  
In black and white in the Congressional Record.  
Maybe you think that document is crazy.  
Perhaps the leading nation of this earth  
Is a rip-roaring big insane asylum.  
If so — I say it in all reverence —  
’Tis a rare privilege to be a maniac.”  
The lodgemen said: “ Amen. The Lord’s own truth.”

“ It is a privilege we’re proud and glad  
To pay for with our lives, if need must be.  
One of these brave boys has sciatica.  
Did he hang back from toilsome nightly duty?  
One rose from a sick bed with tonsilitis,  
And all are overworked like tired horses.  
Got up at four, eh, boys? to milk the cows.  
Twelve hours in the field a-chopping weeds,  
Then cows to milk again and not a cent  
To buy the wife a dress at the year’s end.  
Is this a human life? ” the Goblin groaned.  
“ No, no! ” the faceless figures answered back.  
A bright, hard ray shone from each slitted eye,  
The light of abnegation and sincerity.

“ To business now,” says Lawyer Spiller, snappy.  
“ Our lodge has ways of learning all things, prompt.  
Our information on the party line  
Is that you’ll deed your fruit farm to the wop.  
Behind this wop, stretch bloody hands of Rome  
And Darwin colleges and scarlet dames  
And Russians and I. W. W.  
And Wall Street, too, the Jewish part of it.

A precious bunch of coiling rattlesnakes!  
We must forbid the deal in self-defense.  
We ain't particular how Italians fare.  
We'd hate to have the law upon a lady."

Her eyes blazed at him. They'd have burned two holes  
In anything she looked at long enough.  
Her face was paper-white and luminous  
And great winds from eternal dawns of God  
Came rushing to sustain her as she spoke.  
She felt Him near at hand, compassionate,  
She felt Him powerful in boundless space.  
The lodgemen dimmed like writing blotted out.  
Her mission broke on her in waves of light.

"Our country was discovered by an Italian  
And named for one." Her thoughts poured swift and  
free.

"Italians painted our religious pictures,  
And Horace and Petronius, I doubt not,  
Wrote nobly as Ralph Waldo Emerson.  
Marcus Aurelius was a moral ruler,  
And elevated as our Woodrow Wilson.  
Our own Italian neighbors here in Dorset  
Work hard and pay their debts and keep clean houses,  
Sing wholesome music and have happy manners.  
They are my friends. Fight them and you fight me! "

"A fight you're spoiling for," says Spiller, rough.  
"I'm glad to shed my blood, if so 'tis willed.  
The Bible on that table, Mr. Spiller,  
Belonged once to a man whose blood flows through me.

He brought the gospel to a Sandwich Island  
And he was eaten by the cannibals.  
Five men of God before him had been eaten.  
He knew that to be eaten was his lot.  
He met his fate with such an iron courage  
The heathen men admired and were converted.  
I could talk here for hours, gentlemen,  
Of Whitsetts who took risks for weaker brethren.  
If you are going to kill me, kill me now."

'Twas clear she'd won a moral victory.  
The room was still as Stasia faced him down.  
A lodgeman said: "No use to go too far."  
Another: "Soon be time to milk the cows."  
The Goblin threatened: "More to come, young lady."  
They walked with creaking shoes to start their cars.

X

HER story stopped: "You see," said she, "my duty,  
Strewn with sharp thorns, but how can I help that?"

I spoke up — always hand in glove with Nature  
To stir sales up and cultivate my market:

"If you were married to that warbling wop  
It would be proof that foreigners are white.  
If 'twasn't right, a Whitsett wouldn't do it."

She turned to ice and clutched tight to her chair.  
Said I, and in my most uplifting way:  
"And babies coming — some with high, slim noses,

And cool blue eyes and tidy yellow hair,  
Some dark and berry-brown with eyes of gypsies.  
You'll run the township for their benefit,  
You'll stand them up so proudly in a stair  
When I come in to see them, curious  
To watch the Whitsett blood go down the future  
Mixed with the race of Horace and Petronius."

Said she, weak-voiced: " You're saying I am silly.  
Our ages are the same, though he is happier  
And so seems younger . . . For a while  
My love was tainted with the personal.  
My conscience ached like a poor, jumping tooth  
I roweled it so steady and so painful.  
But now he is to me but as a symbol,  
A symbol of my duty here in Dorset."

" A symbol, though, might relish a smart wife."

She hopped up nervously and walked away  
To fuss with the begonias at a stand.  
Pulling off yellow leaves, her back to me,  
Said she: " The Whitsetts sacrifice  
For downtrod peoples, but right there it ends.  
My family knew where to draw the line."  
A tear winked down upon a fuchsia plant.

'Twas time to go. From out of my black bag  
I fished some easy volumes of zoölogy  
And botany and entomology,  
Wherein His Wondrous Flexibility  
Was spread out like a map for all to see.

Books stuffed with odd and cheery little items  
As Christmas puddings are with plums and spices.  
Here was a South Sea Island butterfly  
Blessed with five wives, each one a different color,  
And here a curious sea-worm, the bonellia  
Shaped like a cornucopia to carry  
Twenty small males — each one a happy husband.  
Wise foxes it described — monogamous  
Devoted couples that would please a parson.  
Unpleasant drakes, unselfish pelicans  
And modesties of fish and beans and plant-lice.  
I keep the books on hand to lend around  
To folks too tragic and too doctrine-bound.  
My beauty shop on wheels gives free this service  
To loosen up the mind and hustle business.  
Upon the books I strewed some sample packets,  
A dab of rouge, perfume, sweet soap, and lipstick,  
And so went bouncing back and into Dorset  
Enjoying flaming air and purpled sunset  
But feeling sorrowful for Stasia Whitsett.  
If she could bring forth young by slips or budding  
Like the geranium, star-fish or polyp  
'Twould be so much less mortifying for her.

## XI

THE next time Lizzie rattled into Dorset  
I saw the new Town Hall and jammed my brakes.  
The place was spruce with Stasia Whitsett's tracks.

She'd been put in as Town Clerk in the place —  
So folks informed me who were passing by —

Of old man Ball, deceased and passed away.  
(’Twas neat of Providence to nip him off.)  
They said it made Attorney Spiller squirm  
As though he’d bit into an apple worm  
To see a Whitsett out to tackle him.  
The women’s clubs, it was, got Stasia in.  
They out and marched with broomsticks, mops and all  
Their banners waving and a slogan saying:  
“ *A good, clean woman in a clean Town Hall.*”

Inside I put, as curious as a crow.  
A smart old girl with hair like fresh, clean snow,  
Mis’ Pansy Lyford of the Civic Circle,  
Came zipping down the shining, soap-scrubbed hall.

“ She’s rallying the Better Element,  
Kindling their souls to work for right and justice,  
Vote down the lodge, snow under Lawyer Spiller.  
’Tisn’t too soon to line up the Town Meeting.  
O, Kate MacQuigg, she has no need of you!  
She’s pretty as a picture — and besides  
Her rock-ribbed character attracts the voters.  
So many who come in to do town business,  
Before they go confide their private worries.  
Her kind heart bleeds for all their miseries.”

“ The hall looks slick,” said I. She whispered, low:  
“ The only cuspidor’s on the back stoop.  
There’s no more spitting just for luxury.  
She’s taken up the job like one inspired,  
She’s more than a Town Clerk — she’s superhuman —

A woman watchdog, yet so feminine!  
It's cute to see her get around the men.  
She makes them *like* to do the things they'd ought to.  
She's had the constable a-rooting burdocks.  
To-day she's got the sheriff on the roof  
Putting new gilding on the weathercock."

I then spied out poor, henpecked Milton Cherry.  
He walked by me on air from Stasia's office.  
"The peacock moth draws males in droves like this,"  
I thought, and wondered what the end would be.

## XII

THEN my October trip to Dorset town.  
Tranquil my eyes as Lizzie coasted down.  
The village dozed in clear, celestial air,  
Folded in gold-lit hills, its houses white.  
The window-panes burned bright in slanting light.  
Wood-smoke in spirals rose from humble hearths.  
You'd think the Babe of Bethlehem was born there,  
Or ought to been, 'twas all so calm and fair.  
But when I drove up to my boarding place  
And walked into the kitchen through the shed  
I found Mis' Angie Cherry on her ear  
With hairpins popping from her irate head.

She dropped a griddle on the spotted cat,  
She beat an egg so fierce the birdcage jiggled.  
She slammed the victuals, vicious, on the table.

Milt Cherry came in, pussy-footing slow,  
So's not to advertise a sudden change.

Gone the moustache, so crinkly and so yellow  
It worried me to see him eat in under.  
He'd turned into a slicked-up spruce old beau,  
As livened up and blooming in his soul  
As late fall pansies in his buttonhole.

The silence was snake-eyed and packed with poison,  
But still we set down in the dining room  
To eating that would tie a god to Angie.  
The relish of spiced pears was fresh and luscious,  
And oh, the pot-cheese and thick clotted cream,  
And goosebr'y jam, odd-tasting, but delicious.  
It *was* a prime meal, though a coal of fire  
Heaped on the head of a mean, sinful man.  
Angie's own supper was weak tea and yeast-cake.  
Milt ate his pie, then cocked a dreamy eye  
And mumbled, soft and tender into space,  
As though he spoke with angels, not with us:  
"I always stuck to it that Stasia's human."

'Twas this turned Angie into a wild woman.

"I won't live on," she screamed, "to go through agony.  
My mind is set and firm: I'm going to die.  
My grandpa's gun he carried in the war  
And loaded, too, stands in my bedroom closet."

"'Twouldn't go off if you should try to fire it,"  
Said Milt serene, and Angie's jetty eyes  
Jabbed hatpins in him as she stalked upstairs.  
It crawled down through my spine she might mean  
business.  
She has decision, Angie Cherry has.

" I worry no more over such as that,"  
Said Milton peacefully and drank his tea.  
" I know the Lord will care for mine and me.  
My faith is back. For twenty years I'd lost it."

He unrolled tediously a painful saga  
Beginning out in Jaybird, Arkansas,  
And he nineteen and smart and sensitive,  
So different from any other soul  
It felt swelled up and painful like a boil.  
He longed to be a glorious architect,  
And so, to get a start, he learned to carpenter.  
His being, meanwhile, was a yeast of yearning  
Just for the sympathy of a good woman.  
And one day, nosing in a marriage paper  
He had a curious experience.  
He felt the nearness of his ideal love.  
Inside him was a Light, a radiance,  
It was a signal from the powers above.  
Some things you *know* and have no need to prove  
And then — the first ad that his eye fell on  
Was from a girl in far-away New England.  
( 'Twas in a barber-shop the vision came.)  
He wrote, enclosing stamp for swift reply,  
And all the way in a poetic dream  
As senseless as a lamprey in a stream.  
Two years it took to make the hopeful journey.  
He carpentered to Dorset and found Angie.

He married her in part from chivalry,  
Partly to duck mean trouble with her family.  
He tried to keep his old ambitious state

But hadn't strength to do another thing  
Than carpenter to pay for doctoring;  
And the moustache that made him look so odd  
He wore because he felt a clown of God.  
The shock had left him stewing in a juice  
Of self-despising, cynical and faithless.

"But now," he said, "as through a pane of glass  
I see 'twas not my wife the signal meant.  
'Twasn't for her I carpentered to Dorset.  
There's *understanding*," said he, "in Miss Whitsett.  
To talk with her is all I ask," he said,  
"Five minutes in a week will do me well."  
Quite blissful he ran on and on about it,  
Then went to see his stamps as was his habit.  
By ten I heard his footsteps overhead.  
Soon snores of Angie and her erring spouse  
Proclaimed 'twas well in the connubial bed.

### XIII

I took myself to bed and lay and read  
Of grasshopper and deadly praying mantis  
Who eat their males midst conjugal caresses.  
My mind went sniffing back across my territory  
And lit atop of many a comely lady  
(And homely, too, as for example, Angie)  
I noted down as husbandiverous.  
Did gentle males of big she-ogresses  
Admire to be dragged about and et?  
Did Mr. Cherry when it came to that?  
Where had I seen a human lady spider  
Minus a humping male as a provider?

So browsed my thought like a lone kitchen mouse.  
Ghostly the house, dark silence all about;  
An iron *click* made all my goose flesh rise.  
'Twas followed by a huge, deep-throated roar  
That sent me through the door and down the hall  
To see if grizzly bear or crack of doom  
Was in the Cherrys' room, a-tearing round.

Now how can I describe the stink and muss  
Let off by Angie's grandpa's blunderbuss?  
There was poor Milt wound up in a hard ball,  
Scrunched up tight like a chicken in a truss,  
So skinny in his nightshirt and so small,  
Whimpering pitiful, " I'm killed, I'm killed! "  
While Angie in her cotton-flannel gown,  
Her hair in two tight braids, her gun thrown down,  
Stood by real satisfied with what she'd done.

She pointed with a finger long and lean.  
" He took a bath," she said, " and wasn't drove!  
I've been deprived of Tanlac and Peruna  
And Analgesic Balm and Catarrh Jelly,  
But he's spent out for lotions and perfumery.  
He's shaving every day, it seems to me.  
And now he's gone and got his moustache off.  
Pity he couldn't do that for his wife! "

" Well off is off," said Milton in a fit,  
The while I poked to see where he was hit.  
Angie had jawed to get that moustache off  
For years and years. 'Twas hard fought-over ground.

" We'll see, now, what the law will say to that,"  
Said Angie. " I have my evidence.  
I lay awake and sharp-eared watch I kept.  
You talked of Stasia Whitsett as you slept."

#### XIV

I GROPED to get a tight-stuck window up.  
The air was gruel. . . . Unsavory  
Burnt pillow feathers, ancient gunpowder  
And staler fumes of human lunacy  
In gargoye shapes, tongues out, defiantly.  
Crack-crack. . . . Up flew an age-stuck window.  
Serene the moon above the dark-massed willow.

Field, tree, and hill, church, water-mill — all still.  
In snowy light, the village houses lay;  
Then Pansy Lyford's face, so shrewd and brisk  
Emerged from all the hush and silveriness.  
She lived next door, she'd heard the noise and mess,  
She stood down by the garden lilac bush,  
Her rubber gloves on and her lantern lit.

She called upstairs: " I've phoned for Stasia Whitsett.  
We'll need the help to-night of her sound judgment,  
This town's not used to foul play and to shooting."  
On party lines the ill news flew about  
The citizens streamed in from opal night.

First, Cassius Grout, the Dorset finance king,  
No hand so clammy for a handshaking;  
Also, on diapered fragilities,

On gracious shapes of strange and luminous trees  
Walked Mrs. Grout, pink, competent, and stout,  
The flame, the energy, the gavel-swinger,  
Convention delegate and fierce steam-roller  
Of haughty Dame and patriotic Daughter.

And limned against pale green translucencies  
Advancing forms of persons such as these:  
The learned Amy Treat and Jane Proudfoot,  
The temperance war-horse, Mrs. Emma Leete,  
Some lodgemen, each so private in his sheet,  
And Spiller leading on the white-capped column,  
Maskless, to show he had no shame of it,  
But restless-eyed and hunger-lean and solemn.  
They dribbled in without a shout or knock,  
For Dorset is as honest as the day.  
A fastened door is waste of lock and key.

A car drove up. The headlights quenched the moon.  
A mile-high woman's shadow in green glare,  
And Stasia walked into the torn-up room.  
" Make a soft bed up in my station wagon.  
I'll drive him to the county hospital,  
We won't give up till means of hope are gone.  
Some water in that bowl — "  
She washed the smear  
Of gunpowder from his unstirring face.

While she worked well, the neighbors standing near,  
Milt Cherry looked up like a dying bird,  
Saw Stasia in a bliss of sweet surprise.  
You'd thought the pearly gates of Paradise  
Had dropped him out to run around the block

And get the star-dust shaken from his eyes.  
Some faint words trickled and the neighbors heard:  
" Perhaps God is like you  
A woman I can trust and lean against  
And human, too." Then Angie screamed.  
If her big eyes had popped out any more  
They'd clattered like black marbles on the floor.

The people looked. They got it, one by one.  
The Goblin saw and heard and turned to stone.  
He took just one swift glance at Angie Cherry  
Flopped on the bed, and ominous to see.  
He went direct, to offer sympathy;  
And standing by, within a good earshot  
Was Cassius Grout and Mrs. Cassius Grout  
And such a sprinkling that I noticed it  
Of those who carry gossip-bones about.  
Young Peavy Jarves, the pale, damp undertaker,  
Lively old Sally Spratt, and her twin brother,  
Lucida Sage, the village soothsayer.  
Now Angie's mouldy angers sputtered out  
Each one as crackling and hissing-hot  
As though 'twas being fried in bacon-fat.

Stasia meanwhile got Milton down the stairs.  
The men-folks sprang and almost fought to help her.  
She was so filled with joy to be of service,  
She never knew she'd lost her character.

## XV

AGAIN the headlights drowned the sailing moon,  
Stasia and Pansy took old Milton off,

With men to help perched on the running board.  
The car was lost to sight above the hill.  
The crowd milled back again to gape and stare  
At Mrs. Cherry, now a sight to see,  
For she might get state prison or the chair.  
She sat propped up in bed, red-cheeked, revived.

Nearby, stood Spiller, forelock tossed awry,  
His arms shot out like arms of octopi,  
His Adam's apple strove in oratory.

" My client meant to kill herself. Instead  
So wild she was at being put upon,  
The shot went crazy. Ah, the tragedy  
That lies behind that litter on the floor,  
Her wedding photographs, the ' Stag at Bay,'  
And Calvin Coolidge, looking wry and doleful  
As well he may. . . . For here's the dear old flag  
Mopped underfoot and draggled in the dust.  
Miss Whitsett walked on it, I had to notice,  
In her swift yank to help out Milton Cherry.  
She trod on it by chance — yes — yes, indeed,  
This champion of Dorset's foreign element! "

We saw a million dog-toothed Bolsheviki,  
Each with a bayonet stuck through a baby,  
The while he placed the chromo of our statesman  
Aloft on Angie's highboy, reverently.  
" Salute, boys, and undo the infamy! "  
The sheeted ones stood up with hands to head.

" My anguished client here," the Goblin said,  
" Didn't mean murder when the gun went off,

And secondly, her man is not yet dead,  
And thirdly, if he is, he ought to be.  
*Another woman figures in this case! "*

He held the dread word long upon his tongue,  
It might have been a juicy slice of cake.  
Excitement rose in leaping, zigzag waves,  
It popped and snapped and tore the room asunder.  
'There's no ingredient so excellent  
As sin for flavoring of bloody murder.  
Miss Emma Leete and earnest Amy Treat,  
The dean of women, Mrs. Jane Proudfoot,  
Cried with an awful voice: " You speak her name! "  
Said Spiller: " You have seen what you have seen! "

## XVI

FRIDAY the shooting was. By Saturday  
The gossip was a muddy waterspout,  
But Stasia at her home, not knowing what  
The crafty Goblin's busy schemes had wrought,  
Took time from Town Hall duties for high thinking,  
Communion with her books, the season's pickling.  
Tomatoes must be saved from frost and rotting.

Now it was over, all the tragedy,  
(Her skillful hand snipped off tomato skins)  
And she had helped all hand and mind could do  
And sat there working on the porch alone,  
Trifles she hadn't sensed in last night's strife  
To salvage Milton Cherry's dim half-life  
Stalked like wolf-shadows through her aching brain.

The whispers — were they real or were they not?  
Fragments of spectral dreams or actual  
As that oil-flame, a-sputter on the wick?  
*She's run with shocking company of late,*  
*She took off mourning after she was town clerk.*  
*A reason for it, too, I make no doubt.*  
Black forms by Angie Cherry whispering,  
And then from strange and furtive eye the flight  
Of looks that pass like dark-winged carrion birds  
From a foul carcass, hidden in tall grass.  
An inner knowledge of a Monstrous Thing  
Shrouded in distance now, but drawing near,  
Pricked gooseflesh pimples over shrinking skin.  
A premonition of a hand of pitch,  
A lengthening, slimy hand and evil-smelling.  
O, if it touched her, then she could but die,  
Let fall the shades and close her eyes and die,  
Laid out in state upon the ancient bed  
Where in her last act as a loyal Whitsett  
Once lay Great-aunt Cecile who ate the cruet.

She shed hot tears of pity for the dead.

How sorrowful to part with common things!  
Her old hook rugs, with colors soft and dim,  
The garden bed she'd planted twenty springs.  
Never again to see her yellow roses!  
Nor tend her growing beets and curly lettuce,  
Nor yet to smell brown bread on baking day  
Nor washings dried on grass . . . and not to see  
Amber and coral, red of royal rubies  
In jell with autumn sunshine pouring through it. . . .

Alas, to leave the life of mind and spirit!  
Her maple bookcase, Lisha Whitsett made it,  
Shelved noble works that formed her character.  
Lowell and Longfellow and Whittier  
And dear Thoreau who taught her eyes to see.  
From Emerson she'd learned to disagree  
Even with Emerson on what was right.  
Her children's corner was a wholesome treasure,  
The Rollo books and good Louisa Alcott.  
Below it, books on tempted womanhood,  
The Mill on Floss, Jane Eyre, Adam Bede.  
Poor Hester with her scarlet ornament  
Was closer and more real than any sister.  
She knew her with excitement, mixed with horror.  
She loved well, too, the poems of Walt Whitman,  
His vision of our country, grand and free,  
"Too free, too free," she heard Judge Whitsett say  
While pasting half the pages tight together.

White-carven, stark and dead,  
Woman of stone on high four-poster bed  
And Stasia weeping on, un comforted  
Until a fearful, outlaw thought broke through:

"She died and never knew what females know  
A wren, a mole, a hen, a mother cat. . . ."

*Now how came an idea so low as that?*  
A cricket chirped, a bluejay whistled clear  
And then flowed in from far and far away  
The Perfect Love that casteth out all fear  
From that deep-fruited land in Dorset Valley

From him who was a Symbol and a Sign,  
A song upon the wind as red as sumac.

Pale, pale she sat, with still, uplifted head  
Her upturned eyes with glory tenanted.  
Again. . . . again. . . .  
The arrowy strange joy that stabbed like pain,  
The flash, the guiding light, the whirl of wings,  
The sense of life, its inward blossomings. . . .

. . . . .

Slowly it passed, the white intensity,  
Back came the world of work and Everyday,  
Unreal at first the cat, the pickle-crock,  
The kettle near to burning on the stove.  
She stirred it steadily and spiced it well,  
Pickles were part of life, its human food,  
The life that God had stamped again as good.  
Ungrateful would it be to let food spoil  
Because His grace now wrapped her like a cloud.

She then laid out her church clothes, daintily.  
A white-silk, lace-edged stepin, made by hand.  
'Twas nice, but not too nice to worship in.  
She mended gloves with precise, thrifty stitches,  
Shortened the sleeves of her blue taffeta,  
And when I came with Lizzie on my rounds,  
She acted like a normal customer.  
She bought faint rouge, a box of fine pearl powder.  
(The yeast from my black bag was working in her)  
And told of morbid moods the day had brought  
And how the faith within had caught her up

To joy and peace and high experience  
And zest renewed in her for public duty.

## XVII

THE people gasped as with a single breath.  
Two centuries had rolled along in Dorset,  
Never the like of this at Sunday worship.  
A hooded line marched down the center aisle,  
A silent and slow-moving caterpillar.  
It settled in the front pews, sinister.  
Weird figures rose and massed around the pulpit  
As brazenly as though they'd bought and owned it.  
Behind the holes of masks was gleam and glitter.

No hero tried to stop the dreadful scene,  
Much less, the Reverend Tisdale, pale as salt  
At horror so archaic and obscene.  
Said he: "The lodge requests to have its say,  
It asks leave for five minutes of our time."  
The Goblin strode up stately to the pulpit,  
He wore no mask, he was so proud of it,  
He swished half-circles with his flowing sleeve.

Swift as the dauntless wife of Lisha Whitsett  
Chased off the redskins with a pudding kettle  
Rose Stasia from her seat, high in the choir.  
Her courage lifted like a helmet feather,  
Her courage was a lustrous coat of armor,  
The legs of Enoch Spiller quaked before it.  
She came down to him and she stood before him,  
She faced him for an awful glacial minute,

She gazed while breathing ceased and necks were craning,  
Her eyes were reprimanding and unwinking:

“ You gentlemen must leave and in good order,  
Or I shall telephone the governor.  
He was a colleague of the Judge, my father.  
Church is for worship, not for vulgar uproar.”

No sooner had she named the governor  
Than venom lit the eye of Goblin Spiller.

“ He might be a good lodge man, duly sworn,  
The governor might be. You watch him choose  
'Twixt foreign cattle and the native-born,  
He'll make short work of it.  
No longer can you talk us stony-blind  
Or wave aloft the high-toned Whitsett name,  
For every Vigilante knows the look  
You have while sitting under orchard trees  
Teaching the plotter from a reading-book.  
Science has brought the incident so near  
We've seen the lint you picked from off his coat,  
The rhubarb wine you scoffed the law to make,  
And oh, the simpering and lally-gagging  
Five minutes by the clock for handshaking.  
After you took to commerce with the wops  
Came the first crime that stains the town of Dorset.  
Who brought calamity to Mr. Cherry?  
Who is his murderer as he lies dying?  
Not shot, I understand no bullet touched him,  
But almost dead of fright, and that is worse.  
Between you and that shooting, tracks are thick.”

The name of Dorset got an inky smirch  
By all that happened in the next brief minute.  
The lodge forgot the due of any church,  
Din split the air: the stamp of bunioned feet,  
Cat-calls and hisses flew from every sheet,  
Eyes gazed at Stasia, hot and curious  
As eyes from pool rooms view the passing skirts.  
Forests of fingers like old hemlock roots  
Aimed straight at the proud head of Stasia Whitsett  
While rough-edged voices twanged: "O, brazen strum-  
pet!

Sit down, be still, you witch, you Jezebel,  
You long-tongued woman out of Babylon."

The dread words struck her like black balls of pitch,  
The lengthening, slimy hand was laid upon her,  
Her world was all a chaos and a whirling,  
She couldn't come nor go, there was no turning.  
She had but left demeanor, high and noble,  
She stood up straight, but ice-white and immobile,  
Her eyes closed on the tumult spread before her,  
Her dropped lids curtained in her privacy.

The zeal of running with a leaping pack  
Glinted in eyes of good folk, mild of manner.  
Behind me, hissing like a hooded cobra,  
Were ladies of the Dames and D. A. R.,  
And Mrs. Grout: "It's good enough for her,"  
And Cassius Grout: "With so much smoke, there's fire."  
Instructive sight for naturalist to see,  
But O, alas, for lofty Stasia Whitsett  
Who had for succor but her loving God.

She dropped down helpless in the muddy flood  
Stunned by a horror with no name to it.

### XVIII

"THE truth has closed her mouth," the Goblin said,  
"Only a guilty heart can quell a Whitsett,  
We warned the woman, but she made her bed,  
And low she lies on it."

He lifted up to sight a book of ritual,  
The sizzling sheets subsided at the signal.

"Friends, I aspire to be the town grand juror,  
And sacred is the hope within my breast  
That in the future, I am privileged  
To serve each one of you as prosecutor.  
The law looms up, I have a duty to it;  
The law is sounder far than tar and feathers,  
The law stays put and high and low respect it,  
The law will run her out of town for us.  
To-morrow, then, the law must take its course."

His voice died down, for an intake of water  
And on the silence rose a whispering.  
It swelled into a quack and cackling.  
Miss Emma Leete rose up from a front seat,  
Solid, red-faced, a dynamo for power,  
Wedge-shaped and iron-framed and hard to beat,  
A toughened fighter, W. C. T. U.,  
She hurled athletic words and carrying:  
"I've nursed the sick from here to Oregon,

I've stumped for suffrage, prayed in tough saloons,  
I know what men are and I know what life is,  
I know good women and I know bad women,  
And this is the Lord's truth I have to tell:  
She didn't faint like any Jezebel."

Now brave Jane Proudfoot of the Seminary,  
Low-voiced and fine of grain and prettier  
Than anyone of sixty ought to be,  
She cooled the air with white-haired dignity,  
The while she uttered, most emphatically:  
"She went down like a Whitsett and a lady."

"She fell right over, light as a bird feather,"  
Said Amy Treat, "Her limbs were tight together."

Then Pansy Lyford of the Civic Circle  
Walked straight up front and faced the Goblin down:

"She would have gone to jail for principle  
And happy-hearted, singing hymns to God.  
So did her forefathers in Cromwell's day  
It's in the Whitsett genealogy.  
But this black thing — how could she answer back,  
Or even touch it, with a long-pronged fork,  
Unless she soiled herself with thoughts of that  
Which isn't thought about by decent folk  
Or let into the mind or known about."

A sneering laugh tore out of Goblin Spiller.

"Jail it may be before this thing is over,  
She'll be hard-put to call it principle."

He waved Miss Lyford off and turned to Stasia  
To ply her nose with smelling salts and camphor.

The women shrilled: "Don't dare to touch her!"  
They moved up dauntlessly and lifted her,  
They bore her off in Pansy Lyford's car.

## XIX

### MISS WHITSETT'S LIFE EBBS IN TWO-MONTH SLEEP WHILE STRANGE TRANCE BALKS LAW

Ink turkey red.  
Beneath, a constable caught quick by snapshot.  
He waited on the steps to serve some papers.

### FARM WIFE HURLS LOVE-THIEF CHARGE AT SLEEPING STASIA; SEEKS \$10,000 BALM

Angie went free, got off by Lawyer Spiller;  
But still more charges — and unspeakable —  
Might yet be brought against the great-granddaughter  
Of Whitsetts, Edwardses, and Matherses.  
And,

### SLUMBER MARATHON BAFFLES 6 DOCTORS

The Goblin's officer, so it appeared,  
Had too much proper pride to stay inside  
To be trod on as mud by Stasia's guard.  
The icicles descended from his beard.

The cameras caught Stasia in her bed,  
The old four-poster of the house of Whitsett  
So high you'd have to take a ladder to it,  
And carved in pineapple and canopied.  
Of noble ways it spoke and orderly.  
Miss Pansy Lyford sadly stood beside it.

DORSET COUNTY SEETHES;  
WOMEN FLAY MASKED GANG

Her face was scarified by lines of sorrow,  
Some rightly there, some deepened and inked in.

GRIM DEATH STALKS  
BLUEBLOOD SLEEPER

Firm by the fireplace young Mariano  
Brought in the wood with honest, boyish smiling.  
He'd come to help in Stasia's darkest hour,  
Not as a hired man, but as a neighbor,  
To shovel snow and save the pipes from freezing,  
To keep the dry wood stacked up in the shed.  
Miss Lyford spoke of his accommodation,  
Of good, shrewd commonsense stored in his head.  
He turned a ready wit to everything  
As if there was some Yankee blood in him. . . .

DENY HIGH-BORN MAID  
BRAIN OF BOOTLEG RING

Now came great days of gusty life for Dorset.  
Would Stasia die or not?  
A white-souled angel or too human woman?  
Would she awake, her soul clean as a pin

Or sleep and sleep until old age set in?  
Great issues clove the church, the barber shop  
Where Cassius Grout, once shut-mouthed as a rock  
Dropped dead midway of windy argument.  
The village had a quick, delightful shock.  
"The Whitsett tart!" Face-first he pitched right out  
His sentence nipped apart by his weak heart,  
His chair was vacant and his shave and hair-cut  
Were finished slick by Jarves, the undertaker.  
Said Mrs. Grout: "His murderess is Stasia!"  
And others, fierce: "His blood's on Spiller's head."  
The little son of shrewish Gertie Myer,  
He set his Uncle Abner's barn afire,  
Outcome of quarrel after Sunday dinner.  
The Daughters, then, drew up a daring paper  
Ordering foreign-born to where they came from,  
And sat back bravely, waiting for the bomb.

The married had some hard words over it,  
Who was to blame for what and all the rest,  
Though only two divorces came of it,  
And these the public peace could well afford,  
For by and large there came an extra zest  
To bed of lawful wedlock and to board.

Never such ruddy winter health in Dorset;  
The dying clung to life to watch Miss Whitsett.  
With one foot in the grave, they yearned to see,  
They stayed alive from curiosity.  
Even the withered midwife, Sally Spratt,  
Eighty-nine years in May, she'd get to be,  
She'd never seen a case so strange as that.  
She'd heard, though, of a baby, born half-cat.

Lucida Sage, the oracle of Dorset,  
A pert old lady who believed in werewolves  
And tipping tables, spooks, and ectoplasm,  
She took forthwith to trance and psychic spasm,  
Summoned the piping voice of Little Bright Eyes,  
Addressed the rough-neck shade of old Lish Whitsett.  
Her soul, indomitable and hardy midget,  
Roamed far and wide in astronomic spaces.  
Her fees for prophecy of what would pass  
Spread out for seeing eye in globe of glass  
Were piling in the bank for Henry Ford.  
She now could draw from Universal Good  
A fiat of his mind, made steel and wood.

Up climbing hills, to see pale Stasia Whitsett  
The neighbors came with bundle and with basket  
All day in a thin line, like army ants  
With soups and jells and snips from off their plants.  
If she came to, she'd need choice nourishment.  
Before the deep snow came to stop the autos  
Cars dropped in on the way from Canada,  
Cars from York State, Long Island, and New Jersey.  
The Dorset merchants thought it rather grand,  
They hung signs out of "Welcome. Come again."  
The back road justified a hot dog stand.  
But oh, the hunt for Whitsett souvenirs,  
The antique men with hard and wolfish eyes.  
A spoon once eaten with by Adamses,  
A witch-ball, treasured for two centuries,  
A clipper ship inside a blown-glass bottle,  
All disappeared, nobody knew who got them.  
Miss Pansy Lyford put a stop to that.

From four to six on Fridays, she arranged it,  
Only that time, she'd hear no more about it,  
Was open house for those who wished to visit.  
She worked a plan out, there was system in it,  
'Twas like a weekly funeral, no less,  
Last somber rites and doleful auspices.  
Stores shut at four, the schools ten minutes early,  
Sleighs ran out from the village livery,  
The town of Dorset went stark, staring crazy.

Between the print and in it, this, not missed  
By enterprising eye of naturalist.  
I gathered up black bag and beautifiers,  
I caught a train to Dorset territory,  
For Lizzie was at rest on empty tires  
Dreaming of cowslip flame and red-bud fires  
This bitter spell of dead-cold January.

## XX

WE moved like muffled phantoms in a row,  
We pilgrims to the sleep of Stasia Whitsett,  
To where the white house slept in falling snow  
The sifting white above, thick white below  
Spectral and dim . . . now seen . . . now vanished  
quite  
Now faint against the swirling, graying light,  
A transient shape, an irreality.

White-shrouded air and whitened, turmoiled skies  
Blotted out gambrel roof and weathered chimneys,  
Quenched pillared porches, stately entrances  
And gable-ends, peaked high in hoods of white.

Drifts slept upon the fence, the privet-hedges,  
Drifts banked the buildings to the window-sashes,  
Sharp icicles in ghostly row on row  
Fringed sheds and barns and house; and eerily  
The ice-encrusted creeper clinked and swayed.

And ominous and changed the pasture bushes  
And fabulous the beasts that once were roses,  
Malign the monsters that were berry bushes  
Crouching to guard the hid, the sleeping princess.

Weightless we walked on weightless deeps,  
A-tiptoe, breathless. One loud-spoken word  
Would crack the frozen world and raise the dead.  
And "Hush," and "You hush, too," and "Sh — sh —  
shhhhhh."

## XXI

Now Pansy Lyford in black taffeta,  
Her mien transfigured by high sorrowings  
Opened the door and clasped each mittened hand.

"If 'tisn't Kate MacQuigg! My land, my land!  
And here is Aunt Lucida Sage again,  
And our Jane Proudfoot. Now, it took some sand  
To brave a storm like this.  
It's good to see  
The Culture Circle standing firm by me,  
And how are you, good Dr. Parmelee?"

Then, briskly: "Now the line goes up the stair,  
Pass right ahead and through the double door.

There on the bed that Lafayette once slept in,  
You'll see her sleep," she wept, "to wake no more.  
Return by the back stairway. Follow arrows  
Which take you back here to the birch-log fire  
For good, hot coffee and a codfish ball."

Her eyes were steady now, she spoke to all:

"This may be your last sight of Stasia living,  
It may be your last sight of any Whitsett,  
So see — stamp deep your memory with it.  
Make final judgment of her character.  
I will not try by so much as a breath  
To influence your honest thought about it.  
Take all the time you need for last respects,  
And face your conscience frankly with this question:  
'Does she look like the ones who hold with sex?'"

## XXII

AHEAD in the long line, spry Sally Spratt,  
"Whack-whack . . . whack-whack," she thumped a  
lively crutch.  
Bent over double like a skinny witch,  
She hung suspended over Stasia's bed  
Two egg-like eyes, veined tinily in red,  
An age-dried face, descending to a beak.

"The dear, dead girl, I speak of her as that,"  
So in a wheezy quaver, Sally Spratt.

"As natural as life!" Tap-tap . . . tap-tap,  
The agile staff of Sally Spratt's twin brother,

A chipper sight at any funeral  
That smart old pair, first one and then the other.

Harp-like the strain of Dorset's milliner:  
"She is beyond all pain, is our dear martyr."

The sighing sister of the minister,  
"How spirit-like her fingers clasp that calla!"

The early twilight rolled in, gray, enormous,  
The winter's white, blank eye stared in at us,  
The bedside candles rocked in flooding dusk.

Now popped into the spotlight of the line  
Miss Prudy Hooper, dressed up slick and fine,  
Head of the Club for Local History:

"That hand-wove, hemstitched sheet has age to it,  
It came from off the loom of Mis' Lish Whitsett,  
The Indians were scared to death of her,  
She saved their souls, she was a bargainer,  
She bought their land, two miles away they heard  
Her voice raised up in consecrated prayer.  
Old Dorcas Whitsett made that coverlet —  
(I'm glad they drew it high above her breast.  
How sweet her hands are folded over it!  
How nice her hair looks rippling all around it!)  
The crocheted lace upon her white nightdress  
Was Hepzibah's or maybe Christable's,  
The Bible on that table there belonged to  
Darius John, consumed by cannibals."

Solemn and slow, we moved around the bed,  
Solemn and slow, and no more words were said,

Till, weasel-sly, Horse Doctor Parmelee  
The spy of Spiller's, never to be trusted,  
Raked quick across a box of safety matches,  
He held a flame-spit down to Stasia's lids,  
His words reeled out: "My God, she's not pretending!"  
Round beads of fear-sweat started from his head.

Said Amy Treat: "The thought of Stasia shamming  
Is in poor taste and does not edify us.  
There is in her no more dishonesty  
Than stained the lovely lady of Shalott  
Who floated on a barge to Camelot,  
Or poor Elaine of Mr. Tennyson  
Who floated, too, in high nobility.  
What other character in literature  
Might she be classed with?"  
Through her learned glasses  
Miss Amy Treat, retired English teacher,  
Surveyed the ladies of the Culture Circle.

"Lucrece of Rome, who died for purity,"  
Replied Sue Pringle, with agility.

Then Jane Proudfoot: "You ladies come with me."  
We trailed off where she led, with candle lit,  
She showed us the top drawer as Stasia left it,  
Not so much as a buttonhook awry.  
Said Jane Proudfoot: "That drawer decided me."

We listened for what further she might say  
For Mrs. Proudfoot is so scholarly,  
The dean of women at the Seminary,  
The teacher, too, of physiology.

She whispered: " It is logic hard to beat  
For there is that in all carnality  
Even the legal and the necessary,  
Even the married and the minimum,  
Which — is — not — neat! "

The president of Dorset Seminary,  
A.B., A.M., D.D., and Ph.D.  
By name Prof. Spafford Pringle, joined the line,  
The ladies rustled up to sip the wine  
Of intellect and masculinity.  
Weighty his body, pondering his head,  
Abstractedly and grave, he neared the bed.

Said Amy Treat: " Perhaps Professor Pringle  
Will analyse for us this strange event,  
Advise our citizens which side to take? "

Profound the eye through horn-rim spectacle  
On females, high of brow, yet teachable.

" I . . . will . . . try  
To speak in words . . . quite elementary . . .  
Doctors might name it —

*Schizophrenia* — or if not that  
*Encephalitis* — er — *lethargica*.

' Pretense, malingering,' says Goblin Spiller,  
Sincere he is, you have to give him credit.  
Here is another thought: a clipping on it:

' SHELL SHOCK . . . HYSTERIA, SAYS WORLD WAR  
DOCTOR.'

Physicians show us, if I may interpret,  
Expense of lofty soul to lowly body,

The ravage of the altitudinous.”  
And clouds of words that you could airplane in  
For hours on end and take your lunch along  
Hid wise Prof. Pringle, D.D., Ph.D.,  
Till in an odd and accidental minute  
An illustrative finger touched Miss Whitsett  
And twitched away as though a bright lock burnt it.  
He swung back into line as on a pivot.

Rowdy the clack of clock upon the stair,  
Awe hung as thick as snow in outer air,  
And hugely from the twilight, Terry Curlin,  
The half Roumanian, half Irishman:  
“ If I could live life over, I’d do better.”  
It moved our hearts to see that large man cry.  
Miraculous, the wholesome influence,  
Miraculous, the power of sleeping Stasia.  
Chill wonderment went trickling down the spine  
Of everybody in that winding line.  
His wet eyes traveled slowly up and down her  
And reverent they were and yet come-hither.  
He stroked the sunburst of her wheat-gold hair  
That carried candlelight to shadowed floor,  
That gypsy-dark, warm-pulsed garage keeper,  
So long he stroked, the ladies grew uneasy,  
They pushed him in the line, he stroked no more.

Edged in the flame of candle, Reverend Tisdale,  
His waxen fingers touched her carven face,  
Translucent, now it seemed, and fair and small.  
Soft words and delicate and turned with grace  
Detached themselves and floated into space:

" Strange as the far cold hills, she seems to be,  
Signed off from Dorset and the human race,  
Remote and unconcerned. . . .  
For all she knows of us, who come to see  
Phenomenon uncannier than death  
She might well sleep in Thibet or Bombay,  
A corpse, but for faint rise and fall of breath.  
This sleep is queerer than it seems to be.

" Who does not feel her elevating power?  
The drawing power of saint and noble martyr . . .  
A Sign is in our midst, a Miracle!  
It wrings repentance from our Brother Curlin,  
It stirs all people in this winding line,  
When winter breaks, I freely prophesy  
Pilgrims will journey here from far and wide,  
Sin will be cured and crutches thrown away,  
Foes will repent and rally to her side.  
Just let them see her — even Widow Grout! "

He checked himself and that right suddenly  
Fearing to sail too boldly out to sea  
On wings of grandeur and divine idea:  
Insanity was in his family.

Now Pansy Lyford entered tactfully,  
She smiled about, well poised, and graciously:  
" I do wish we might listen all the day  
To gentlemen so silver-tongued and fine  
But down below, newcomers seek the line.  
To handle and to satisfy so many  
Our system must be followed to a T.  
Good neighbors, will you move along the line? "

### XXIII

WE marched out and the boards creaked under us,  
We followed arrows round the chilly place,  
Down to the big front room where oil lamp glow  
A woodsy, snapping, birch-log fire, too,  
And red-hot chunk-stoves fed by Mariano  
Fought back the darkness and invading snow;  
And all the air was rich with coffee smell,  
And in and out the kitchen doors were swung.  
And in and out the aproned ladies flung.  
They took the line around a heaped-up table,  
The cafeteria was run in style,  
The codfish balls were but a fraction of it.  
From back road farms to Dorset village street  
Embattled women baked for Stasia's sake,  
The while the Goblin spread it round the town  
"TRY SLEEPING HER INSIDE THE SHERIFF'S HOUSE.  
SHE'LL ROUSE, ALL RIGHT."  
The while he made mouths water for the sight  
It was but sense to feed the voters well.

Now entered Pansy Lyford, icy white.

"The Widow Grout has come! I didn't know her  
For lengths of black crepe swathed and swathed around  
her  
Until she at me like a snapping turtle:  
'It won't be said I was afraid to face her!'  
Upstairs she put. She's there now, by the bed  
Awful and strange, her eyes like a Medusa.  
Now who can tell what's going in her head?

And trailing in about six feet from her  
Is Angie Cherry,  
And far apart,  
Not seeming to belong to anybody,  
A homeless dog with burdocks in his tail,  
Poor old Milt Cherry! ”

The people gasped: “ My land! ” and “ You don’t say! ”  
And exaltation whitened all the air  
But pain and strain stretched tightly under it,  
And great-thewed Emma Leete roared off in prayer  
And Amy Treat was blanched as celery.  
“ Town meeting day ahead and votes to get  
And if it goes against us, all is lost.  
Whatever happens, girls, remember that,”  
Said Jane Proudfoot who had good cause to worry.  
To make the town of Dorset do the right  
She’d risked her life-work in the Seminary.

A nervous stillness held the waiting room.

#### XXIV

THUMP . . . thump . . . thump . . . thump . . . THUMP  
The backstairs sagged with Mrs. Cassius Grout.  
Two hundred pounds of her if there was one  
And poured in funeral clothes and jellied down  
And all to pieces, sobbing fierce and hard  
She leaned upon her pale and pindling son.

As a great mountain when the sun is gone,  
A pyramid of dark on raven gloom,

Advancing with a somber dignity  
A-star with jet, dim cloud-veils wrapped around  
She moved into the center of the room.

She flowed into an overstuffed big chair,  
She lifted black chiffon . . . a shock to see  
This double-chinned, convulsive Niobe.  
Importantly gleamed diamond and tear,  
The while she speared us with protruding eye:

“ My sainted huband . . . dead . . . ” she choked and  
said,

“ The backbone of the bank, the factory,  
The armory, the female seminary,  
The Union Church . . . Our little town  
Was not a town, but an ideal to him.  
When headlines poured foul scandal down on it  
His pride was crushed, his poor heart lost its beat.  
‘ Young man, believe our country’s newspapers,  
Have faith in print, or where shall we be at? ’  
He always said to knockers and to scoffers.  
Now day by day, the nation’s press implied  
Our township harbored in its midst a Red,  
And she the daughter of the Judge, his friend . . .  
Thinking of Stasia in depravity,  
Spending the gold of cutthroat Bolsheviki,  
Working against the Home and Property,  
Our good man died in tragedy,” said she.

Her only son, Joe Grout, aged thirty-one,  
Obedient child and small old man in one  
Stroked mother’s awful physiognomy.

"I had to see that dying girl to-day,  
All but a corpse — half here, half far away,"  
She shook and shook, her grief rained damply down.  
"It came down on me like a great conversion,  
No better woman breathes beneath the sun.  
The Good, the True, the Regular," said she,  
"Was passing heavenward, right there before me.  
To-morrow, I shall say throughout the town  
My husband's death — was — quite — unneces-  
sary. . . ."

We were too full of deep relief to speak,  
And who should march into our budding peace  
But Angie Cherry, irate and ferocious,  
A serpent priestess out of old Cnossus,  
A mile away the neighbors might have heard her.

"I'll hold my right arm in the kitchen fire  
Before I'll go to court and swear against her.  
I've looked and looked and done my looking well,  
Almost as though the dying girl had said it,  
It flashed upon me as I looked at her,  
'Your husband had an old man's silly spell.'  
As well expect an evil act of Stasia  
As of a woman made of alabaster.  
I didn't need to spoil my Coolidge picture.  
To-morrow I shall turn on Goblin Spiller  
And tell the whole of Dorset he's a liar,  
And drop the case, call off the constable."

"She's human, though, I have to stick to that,"  
So Milton Cherry, trailing meekly in,  
But further words from him were corked tight in

By hell-black looks of wifely discipline.  
She took him by the arm, peremptory,  
I saw a stubble growth above his chin.  
Soon his moustache, the crinkly, corkscrewed wonder  
Would be grown out enough to eat in under.  
His hair was white, he'd added on some age,  
She put a chicken breast upon his plate,  
He seemed relieved to be back in his cage.  
Said she: "We'll buy in Bright Hope Cemetery  
And get a radio for our old age."

XXV

THE March thaw had a sniff of April in it,  
Of old and set and hard things swift dissolving  
In fluid gleams and perfume and a promise.  
Soon would be out to bask in warmth of spring  
The curled-up, gauzy buds, the plume of trees,  
The sensitive gray mice in stubble nests  
So delicately drowsing; silky moles,  
Persnippety young chipmunks, bumbling bees  
And woodchucks snoozing now in dark deep holes.

The sleigh slewed up the melting Whitsett hills.  
Friday — and half the town was out to visit.  
I mused on sleeps of men and animals,  
The little deaths of 'possums and of humans,  
The odd defenses of defenselessness,  
The various shrewdnesses of protoplasm.

Now Stasia's house, impalpable and silver,  
The mossy gambrel roof, wet-streaked with silver,  
Vine raining silver, eavespouts dripping silver,

The larches and black spruces spilling silver,  
For snow was steaming off, the wind was tender.

In all the rooms, beatitude and peace  
For victory was won, the strife was over.  
Poor Stasia's sleep which tore the town asunder  
At last had brought the breath of sweet release,  
And all the hate a-swirl in shaken Dorset  
Had lit, town-meeting day, on Goblin Spiller,  
He'd never dare to show his face again,  
He'd got a job in far Atlanta, Georgia.  
Relief was in the smile of Mariano,  
He knew his lady slept in dark enchantment,  
By Spiller's Evil Eye directed on her.

And votes of thanks for able management  
Of the long line that wound around the bed  
Were poured on Pansy Lyford, Amy Treat,  
The wise Jane Proudfoot, great-boned Emma Leete.  
Reality of Stasia, week by week  
The fact of her, no miracle about it,  
Corrected craziness and lies and slander.  
To serve food was hard work, but food helped, too,  
And so did fine young Dante Mariano.  
A teary mist collected on her glasses  
When Pansy Lyford told how good he was  
To those who took their turn in standing by,  
Who weren't so spry, quite, as they used to be.  
He had his faults — and one was superstition,  
Nor would he eat all victuals placed before him,  
He cooked his own spaghetti in the kitchen,  
But scoured out the pot, real bright and clean.  
And now came out a matter delicate,

Not to be told — not hardly to the doctor —  
While constables were squirming in and out  
Trying to make a break and serve that paper.

To Dorset people packed there in the parlor,  
Miss Pansy Lyford opened up the secret:

One wan-lit night, the third of Stasia's sleep  
A ghostly rustling got the household up,  
Nervous, for fear the lodgemen sneaked about,  
Young Mariano, with his dog and gun,  
Was there to give his life, if need must be.  
Well! It was Stasia moving down the stair,  
A bedspread round her nightgown, and her hair  
Misting down to her knees or thereabout.  
She looked ahead with a queer, sightless stare  
And sorrowful she shook her golden locks.  
She moved like poor Ophelia to the river,  
She made a bee-line for the kitchen food-box,  
Trance-like and strange, she ate a meal of victuals.  
Somnambulism . . . it came regular,  
Perhaps it meant a ray of hope for her.

Kerchiefs came out and many ladies wept  
Likewise a hard-boiled man of real estate,  
And upstairs Stasia Whitsett slept and slept,  
Nor knew that all of Dorset felt for her  
Nor knew that she had back her character.

## XXVI

THE pussies silvered, alders reddened deep.  
By snow-patched banks, swift ink-black brooklets ran.  
The headline crop came surging back again!

STASIA SMILES, STIRS, IN RECORD SLEEP  
PRAYERS ASK NEW LIFE FOR PRETTY PURITAN

Ephemeral, in city parks, new green,  
The little tabloids warbled in the sun:

RICH REALTOR SEES STASIA AS SOUL-MATE;  
MONTANA SHEIK HOPS OFF TO WAIT AWAKING

From frost-bit Maine to tropic San Diego  
Niagaras of mail poured down on Stasia.

FRENCH COUNT PROPOSES VIA RADIO

Also, with violet and bursting leaf  
A Polish cook, a lady novelist,  
A gravedigger, a cop, an Irish mayor  
Made answer to Inquiring Reporter,

"OLD-TIME ROMANCE STILL LIVES IN U. S. A."

"No man took note of her  
Till ill was spoken of her character,  
Now every low-life wants her for a wife."  
Miss Pansy Lyford froze all strange males off.

Riding his tractor, Dante Mariano  
Drove straight, sleek furrows over Whitsett acres,  
Sniffing the scent of soil and good manure,  
Letting his lungs out like robust Caruso,  
Singing his faith in oat crop and potato,  
In God and Henry Ford and Baldwin apple,  
In witch-grass killed, starved fields brought back to  
bearing,

In nurtured love and lively ways of farming.  
Often a Yankee in a bouncing flivver  
Would stop to chew a wisp and chin and wonder.  
Mad as a bedbug was this foreigner  
For ploughing all the Whitsett land at once.  
He'd likely get come-uppance in the poorhouse.  
A shame — a pretty decent sort of fellow,  
Accommodating — never better neighbor —  
He'd worn well through a pestering, damn-fool winter,  
'Twas his own business how he stood with Stasia.

Now came a day the garden leaped to flower,  
And all the land was wild with petals flying  
And hurrying clouds and grasses silvering.  
The lilac trees stood forth like candelabra  
With purple lamps and white they lit the spring.  
Young Mariano felt time ripening  
For Holy Miracles or anything.  
He cut a bouquet large as a peck basket,  
Of plummy iris, heliotrope, and tulip,  
And apple-bloom, shell-pink and exquisite,  
He took it to the bedroom of Miss Whitsett.

Traced on his heart the way to Stasia's door,  
He'd slept outside of it and guarded it  
When chimneys shook before the north wind's roar  
And fields lay dead beneath the paw of winter.  
He'd been inside as handy man and nurse,  
He'd never shirked an irksome sickroom chore.  
Why now this trembling like a timid mouse?  
But soon like sap in maples, will pushed through him,  
He couldn't wait for her another minute.

Too long that sleep, not good, no patience with it!  
He touched his lips to strands of wheat-gold hair,  
She smiled so softly in her dreamy doze.  
He took her in his arms, he drew her close,  
He held the flowers under her fair nose  
And every calyx bobbed its fragrant head,  
And fine scents wreathed and melted all together,  
He raised her face to his: "Wake up!" he said.

"The spreeng! The spreeng! Warm sun! The violetta!  
The small, new calf! Blind kittens in the hay!  
The fat robin! The yellow buttercup!  
The smell of grape — soon — quick —  
All gone, all gone, if we not hurry up.  
Soon rosebush — red!  
Soon we be dead.  
Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! "

He shook her back and forth; and Stasia Whitsett  
Lifted cerulean eyes; before she knew it,  
Before the conscience of the Matherses,  
The Whitsetts, Adamses, and Edwardses  
Had stretched a grisly hand to beat her to it,  
She put her lips to his.  
Never in Dorset such a lengthy kiss,  
While peepers whistled shrill to one another,  
And butterflies were jewels chained together,  
And old house dogs cavorted like Pavlowa,  
And time stood still and all the world grew dim.

Now, having kissed a man so long as that,  
And just that way, you have to marry him.

So, leastwise, ran the gossip as I got it  
When I drove in, book-bag and beautifiers,  
Watching the wakened land and luminous,  
Still lost in thought about the strange to-do,  
Of Nature as she works in kangaroo,  
Ant, scorpion, cuttlefish, and marmoset,  
And bower-bird and eel and Stasia Whitsett.



## *Portrait of an old Mother*

I USED to wonder how divorces and murders could happen to law-abiding, church-going folks with electric lights in their nice white houses, and hollyhocks in their front yards, and money in the bank —

Now — O God — I know!

An awful disgrace may happen to us this morning — to us, the Stovers and the Pillsburys, the oldest families in this township and the best thought of.

I feel sudden death in the air like the smell of a poison lily,

I feel divorce and suicide and the breaking up of a loving family going through the house in terrible red waves,

It goes in dizzy red waves like the waves of thick heat on an August day.

O Lord, I've nothing to blame myself for!

That thought is a cup of cold water in the midst of torment.

I brought Lucy up to be a good woman. Why, she'd sooner hold her two hands in the fire till they burned off than do the things that Hawley girl's done!

I never talked to her of that which shouldn't be spoken  
of.

She never kissed any man but the one she was engaged to  
and married.

Her mind was a piece of blank paper when she went to  
the altar!

## II

THAT lovely wedding

When she walked down the aisle and promised to love  
and obey Lee Stover!

I can see her now — her long veil, her hair like a shiny  
halo round the head of the Virgin Mary,

Eyes that was modest blue posies looking up at the sun —  
The organ playing — the scent of the orange blossoms  
we'd sent away for —

And everybody buzzing about what a well-behaved  
girl she'd always been, and saying "What a hand-  
some couple!" and "How nice that the groom  
has a steady, well-paid job!" and talking of the  
wedding presents and the new oak parlor set,

The sweet alto voice of Mrs. Doctor Busbee singing "Oh,  
Promise Me!"

And I — the bride's mother —

Wiping my eyes, knowing I'd done my duty.

I'd brought up Lucy innocent. I'd kept her mind from  
evil things.

## III

FANCHETTE Hawley! That half-French drab!

If I could have my way I'd drive her out,  
Yes, if she starved and had to sleep in gutters!  
Oh, I knew when I came  
To stay and help while Lucy had her baby  
Just what she was — an adder  
Glittering and coiling — lying in wait!  
If I am sixty-nine, she didn't fool me —  
I'd like to choke her dead. 'Twouldn't be murder,  
Killing a husband-stealer wouldn't be murder!

#### IV

WHEN she asked Lee to take her in his car  
To Boonton Hills to pick some cherry boughs  
I saw the thoughts that crawled and squirmed behind her  
eyes.  
I said: "I'll have my say," and so I says:  
"Decent, self-respecting hired girls  
Don't carry on with married men as you do,  
Don't pull their eyebrows out or wear short hair  
All frizzled like the insides of a mattress,  
Don't wear silk stockings rolled below their knees so'st  
you can't tell where stocking ends and knee  
begins;  
And those that sport bronze pumps to scrub the porch in  
Ain't likely to be better than they'd ought to.  
You might as well write love letters to Lee  
As cook for him the brazen way you're doing,  
Courting him with maple cakes and custard pies,  
And salads as immoral and outspoken as the mating call  
of a low animal.

And his poor wife lying helpless in the hospital  
With her week-old baby! ”

She gave an uppish toss of the red hat she'd spent her last  
week's wages for,  
And a spiteful switch of the silk skirt that cost her a  
month of hard work,

And spit *this* out:

“ Poor Lucy! I guess she ain't so bad off!

She's had Lee some time, ain't she? She's got little Emmy  
and Buddy and the new baby, hasn't she?

She's been kept soft and safe. She's had her living made  
for her and her hard work done for her,

She's had her new Studebaker to drive, hasn't she?

Well, what about me, Mrs. Pillsbury?

Did that God you're always praying to make the world  
for married women?

Do you know there's ten girls to one man in Peacham  
Village?

And all the decent men are married and them that ain't  
are sticks?

And I ain't going to scrub and cook all day and lie awake  
nights half crazy with lonesomeness,

Spring here — and them damn frogs a-hollering in the  
swamp!

“ Look here, Mrs. Pillsbury,

I guess Lee has earned a spell off, what with sticking to  
the business day and night,

Nothing doing for excitement in this dead town,

Lucy melting out of shape over the children like a blob  
of butter on a hot day!

“ Listen, Mrs. Pillsbury,  
Peacham is full of old maids. God! I hate  
Their squawking voices and dried-apple skins  
And I ain’t going to be one of them. Now smoke that in  
your pipe! ”

V

It knocked me flat! That I should live to hear such talk  
Out of a woman’s lips! When Lee brought the car ’round  
I tried to show him there’d be talk and scandal.  
He said that I was old  
And there was things I couldn’t understand,  
And they drove off. The May night swallowed them,  
A treacherous night, it was,  
With smell of apple-blossoms in the air,  
And farmers’ orchards on the far-off hills like small white  
handkerchiefs spread on bright grass,  
There was a sky green as a gooseberry and a moon like a  
thin piece of pie,  
Gold light across the fields and thrushes singing.  
There shouldn’t be such nights. They lead to sin.

VI

O God, this morning —  
Two months after that evening of wrongdoing —  
Eight years after that sweet June wedding in the First  
Congregational Church,  
There was Lee bent double over the wheel of his little  
speed car and racing up and down the road as  
though the devil was driving him. He stopped at  
the edge of the town dump where the selectmen

ought to have put a high iron fence years ago. I saw him looking over the edge. He drove by slow and then came back, zipping along, a black streak, like a man possessed. He teetered along the edge. I shut my eyes and prayed. But he didn't kill himself after all. He came in to breakfast. His face was white and his eyes were bloodshot and I heard him mumbling: "I'm finished, too, and I belong down there. I belong there."

There was Lucy lying on the bed like a blessed angel of Heaven. Poor, poor dear, she doesn't know yet. There are things that can't be sensed by a woman that's been brought up as I brought Lucy up. Her yellow head was propped up on the pillows and Emmy and Buddy was gathered around her to take a peek at the new mite of a baby just back from the hospital —

There was Fanchette Hawley sulking in her room, and throwing things on the floor, saying she was going to take carbolic acid because her appendicitis was worse —

Lord, she knows 'tain't no appendicitis, and I know, and Lee knows.

## VII

I FEEL sudden death in the air like the smell of a poison lily,

I feel murder and suicide and the breaking up of a loving family going through the house in terrible red waves,

It goes in red waves like the waves of thick heat on a dizzy August day —

It is as real as the kitchen stove —

And I've had to get breakfast and find the leak in the  
ice box and pick a chicken for dinner and get a  
sliver out of little Emmy's toe so'st she could go  
to school,

Mr. Babbitt, the vegetable man, poked his head through  
the door and said he had nice fresh rhubarb this  
morning at twenty cents a mess,

The superintendent of the Sunday school 'phoned in that  
the next lesson would be on Noah and the Flood,

Mrs. Hiram Bugbee, regent of the D.A.R., dropped in to  
say that the Daughters would go in automobiles  
to Butternut Center next week a-Tuesday to  
present a silver spoon to old Mrs. Hiram Doder,  
whose great-great-grandfather was a colonel in  
the Revolutionary War,

And the feeling of sudden death hangs in the air like the  
smell of a poison lily . . .

O God, I've nothing to blame myself for! I brought up  
my daughter to be a good woman!



## *Mrs. Doane Comes Back*

T**IREDNESS** turned me to rock. I slumped in the pew  
when people got up to pray.

There was a roar in my head like the rushing of waters.  
Out of my crazy brain came a cloud of whirling red fire  
And out of the cloud burst the voice of the Angel  
Gabriel.

It rose and it fell like the ram's horn trumpets of Jericho,  
Saying: " You've come to the end of your rope, Mrs.  
Doane,

You've got to pay now for having six children in ten  
years,

Pitching hay in the scalding sun to save the price of a  
hand,

Slushing miles through the rain to bring in the lost little  
turkeys,

And learning the Good Book by heart from beginning  
to end:

You're going to die, Mrs. Doane.

*Now who will comb your young ones' hair to go to  
school,*

*Now who will make them scrub their feet to go to bed,  
Now who will give them baths of a Saturday night to  
make them clean for the House of the Lord?*

Out of the whirling red fire boomed the grand voice of  
the angel:

" You held up your head with the best of them,  
Grit was your middle name, Mrs. Doane.

You says: ' We may die on the town, but I keep my chil-  
dren clean as those that own their land! '

The school superintendent told around that there was  
no young ones in the county as spruced up as the  
Doane young ones,

The installment man and the fertilizer agent, and the  
driver of the Tea Comp'ny wagon,

All says: ' I don't see how you do it, Mrs. Doane! '

Behind the flaming pillars of the sunset,

The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost have  
watched you, Mrs. Doane,

They knew how hard you worked when you thought  
nobody did,

They chirked up your strength on awful washing days,  
Their loving-kindness blessed you when you s'posed no-  
body cared,

They felt for you last night when your knees cracked  
and crumpled,

When you'd liked to gone to bed and stayed there for-  
ever.

But you gathered in the children just the same, Mrs.  
Doane,

You scoured them bright as saucepans and made them  
pure for the House of the Lord,

Where you sit now beside your husband, Hiram,

And up from you rises a stairway of starched, well-  
behaved young ones.

There ain't a wrinkle in a white lawn dress among 'em,

There ain't a hole in a stocking toe,  
And of such is the Kingdom of Heaven;  
*Who's going to clean them and comb them after you're  
gone, Mrs. Doane?* ”

Out of the blinding red fire, I heard the mild voice of  
our preacher,  
Picturing Heaven in words as sweet as a stream of bee's  
honey.

Such a cool, lovely, restful place it was, he said,  
With many mansions,  
Where no one has to cook three meals a day,  
With fair, green pastures stretching on and on,  
But no cows to be driven up and milked,  
And still, calm waters  
That didn't have to be lugged in buckets for mopping  
and cleaning;

Blessed meadows, starred with the daisies of the Lord,  
But, oh, no crops in them, never!  
Just angels strolling in shady pathways, with not a stitch  
to do from morn till even,

Our Heavenly Father on His throne, ordering the sun  
and the stars,

Our blessed Saviour shaking hands and making every-  
body feel to home,

And calling little children to fly to him.

Thinks I: “The children of Paradise float through the  
sky.

They're good and nice-mannered for ten thousand years  
on end,

They nestle in flocks on the jasper walls,

They play soft harps, they sing like larks

They don't slide down boards till their breeches rip and  
tear,  
And their wings stay clean by a miracle of God! "

I streaked home for all I was worth, and a tipsy world  
followed.

Fences zigzagged and reeled, the clover fields slanted and  
spun,

I shook like a dry stalk of corn before the Lord's terrible  
warning,

And I prayed: " God, this ain't no time for me to take  
sick and die!

Oh, the kale in the south meadow bean field is taller than  
I be,

I'm behind with my ironing — and all of the children  
need shoes,

And nothing gets done on this place unless I get it done! "

But the Angel Gabriel swept by, and his wings brushed  
the tops of the grasses,

Chanting: " Thus saith the Lord:

Don't you worry, Mrs. Doane,

Let the installment man come and get his old piano,

Let the fruit cans burst and the incubator burn,

Let the sheriff do his worst and sell the farm at auction,

*Let Hiram get his own meals —*

You've done your share, Mrs. Doane,

You're to sit in a golden rocker and crochet a million  
years.

*But 'taint good sense to leave your kids behind you,*

*To let them run loose like a pack of wild hyenas,*

*And have the neighbors say: ' They're a raggle-taggle`  
pack.*

*The Doane kids,' they'll say, 'are a dirty godless pack,'  
And they might as well be singing in the bosom of the  
Lord,  
White and nice-smelling, like washing spread on the grass  
to dry, Mrs. Doane,  
Slick and sweet-smelling, forever and ever, Amen! "*

I fell on my knees in the spare room, and I bowed to the  
will of Jehovah,  
I took a big yellow bowl heaped high with foaming  
soapsuds,  
I called in the young ones, and I scrubbed their necks,  
I dug their ears till they squirmed and hollered,  
I washed their faces till their noses shone,  
I tied bows of ribbon on their cute, stiff braids.  
" And now," I says, " We'll play a little game.  
We're small blue birds with pert black topknots,  
With our mouths popped open for a fat green worm."  
I climbed up a chair and I reached for the laudanum  
We keep for the toothache on a high, safe shelf,  
I fed it to the kids and I shut my eyes,  
And I heard the Angel Gabriel singing in a beautiful  
tenor voice:  
" Alleluia! No young ones ever come to God as clean as  
the Doane young ones! "

\* \* \*

There was a pitch-black fog that hid the face of the  
world,  
Far-off voices came through in fine, thin wires of sound.  
On a quilt was two hands with waxy, potato-sprout  
fingers,

And just in front of my nose was a bright smear of  
light.

It rocked and it swayed, it suddenly turned to a window,  
And merciful God!

I looked through the pane and I saw Jane and Joe,  
My tow-headed Jane and my red-headed Joe,  
Making a din that split my ears.

They pulled hair and scratched and splashed mud on each  
other,

And called the bad names of the low-lived hired man.

A post shot up like the high-knobbed post

Of the spare room bed I'd left forever,

And on the top hung little Sue,

There was bread and egg all over her face,

And apple sauce spilled on her old torn dress.

Her stockings dragged, her hair was in strings,

She sucked sticky candy, she was a sight,

A nastier kid I never saw.

I jumped upright and I let out a yell,

I said: "O Lord, you've made a big mistake,

You said I could rest a million years,

Rest in Heaven and do crochet;

You promised me Heaven and they've taken me to  
Hell!"

And I waited for the voice of the Angel Gabriel,

Like a burning banner ascending the heights of the  
clouds.

But out of the dark poked the face of kind Dr. Busbee,  
Saying: "Don't you take on, Mrs. Doane,

That stuff you gave your kids didn't hurt 'em a mite,

Your head was too wild to find the poison bottle,

Your young 'uns are alive and as sassy as rabbits.

You had typhoid and you all but died,  
Walking typhoid and fever dreams,  
Raving and howling and loony talk —  
But you're going to get well — there — there,  
*This ain't hell. This is home, Mrs. Doane."*



## *The Happy Ending*

I NEVER thought my husband, Jimmie Speed,  
Would get top-heavy with his brains and die  
Or kill himself with too much work,  
But, my God, I supposed  
He was my man!  
And here he'd gone and bought  
A pink hat with a swell stuffed bird on it  
For Doll LaJoy, the perking, painted tart,  
And me still wearing  
That faded henna tam which killed  
The stylish shades of my peroxide hair,  
And that frayed suit with fierce blue checks on it.  
So this was how he passed the time of day  
While I worked my fingers to the bone  
Selling tickets at the Movie Palace,  
Streaking home  
To fry his sausages and sweet potatoes.  
What pains I'd gone to  
To feed that man! And how I'd boiled in sweat  
Scrubbing his smutty shirts and overalls  
So thick with warehouse grease they'd walk alone!

Here I was — thirty-eight, and trapped  
In Jaybird, Arkansas, a lonesome dump,  
Strung out along a spur track of the Frisco  
And a flat swamp of drowning cypress knees  
And scummy water.  
The southerners who got here first  
Looked down on me and called me trash because  
I came from Cedar Rapids, Iowa,  
And slaved and earned to go back there again.  
Fifteen years ago  
Jim dragged me here — and in this tank I'd wasted  
My looks, my voice, my magnetism  
That might have given me a job  
In a burlesque show . . . Fifteen years  
With not a damn thing happening to me,  
Humping along, a slow, dull-colored worm,  
Into a mess like this.

"O, my God!" I moaned,  
"Blowing the cash I'd gouged my soul to save  
So we could scrape the mud of Jaybird  
From off our feet." O God! I'd had  
Enough of lies! Hid in an upstairs closet  
Was a revolver. I jammed it in  
My sewing-bag. I lit out on the run.  
Tears channeled through the powder on my cheeks.  
There he was now, a good stone's throw away,  
Bossing the loading of a cotton car.  
My right hand dived. My finger touched the trigger.  
Say — Jim can thank his stars  
For Salamander Jones. Dodging behind his shanty  
To get my aim, I crashed smash into him.

I fell. I sprawled into a squashy heap  
Of rain-soaked rubbish. As I ripped out some language  
I saw that black man, impudent as sin,  
Loafing by his back door and grinning at me.  
'Twasn't a healthy time for him  
To rile me. I yanked the pistol out  
And plugged him.

The sheriff's voice: " He was the worst darn nigger  
In Phillips County — a trouble-maker right.  
You've done a job  
Somebody had to do, sooner or later."  
He told me then  
To go before the judge and swear  
That I'd shot Salamander to protect  
My womanhood. It was a technicality, he said;  
So I took oath. At once my draggled days  
Came to a happy ending.  
Jaybird saw my true worth. The paper flashed the news  
I was a heroine.

The band played in my honor.  
The Citizen's Committee sent a wire  
To a big shop in Memphis. The night train brought  
A gorgeous hat that made Doll's lid look sick.  
I put it on  
Holding my head like Mrs. Vanderbilt  
And sailed down Main Street to the Movie Palace  
To sell my tickets. On the crown  
With plumes that sprayed in delicate gold-mist  
Over my suit with fierce blue checks on it  
Was a real bird of paradise. It cost

A hundred dollars. Jim took a skittish look  
Where Salamander's body swung  
High on a gum tree in the Courthouse Park,  
Tattered with bullets that the crowd put through it,  
And said he'd mustered up the decency  
To break with Doll.



## *With Colors Flying*

THEY got the best of it, did Uncle George  
And Uncle Abner. I lay half-dead with typhoid  
In Ardmore, Oklahoma. The tent show had gone broke.  
“Not a red cent,” wrote Uncle Abner, “to pay your  
way  
Back to a life of sin; but if you want  
The place you ran away from,  
If you’ll keep house decently and do your duty,  
There’s fifty thousand between us  
We’ll leave you when we die.”  
They were old men, my uncles,  
When, at eighteen, I left them for the city,  
Hoping soon to be a Bernhardt.  
How could their money, squeezed from farm fore-  
closures,  
Serve better than in putting me across?  
So I returned — to relatives  
Who nodded meanly each to each and said:  
“We told you so! We said she’d crawl home beaten!  
Maybe now  
She’ll talk and act like decent folks — at least  
Wear modest clothes.” To show them all

I still despised their dreary ways and didn't give  
A finger snap for what they thought,  
I went, the night of my arrival, to a social  
At Poplar Grove Schoolhouse,  
Wearing the frock of scarlet chiffon velvet  
That made a hit in "Madame X." After refreshments  
I smoked a cigarette,  
Blowing aloft frail smoke rings, symbols  
Of my undefeated spirit.  
When Uncle George was eighty-eight  
And I, after six years of death-in-life,  
Was nearing forty,  
He milked twelve cows daily and punctually ate  
A half mince pie for breakfast; and I heard Abner say  
The morning he was ninety:  
"George, you make tracks to the sugar woods an' learn  
That lazy hired boy to earn his victuals.  
I'll hitch up Moll,  
Haul a load of cider to the village, see about  
The tenants on the Widow Randall farm."  
One day the doctor said:  
"They come of long-lived Vermont stock,  
Gaunt old trees and tough,  
Frost-nipped, bark off here and there, but good  
For all of ten years more."  
Ten years! Ten thousand years  
It might as well be — worrying  
That George's mittens must be darned, beans put to soak  
Or Abner's dirt-stiff overalls washed out —  
And all the while  
Hearing the kitchen clock above the sink  
Ticking away my life,

Watching the winter winds, like hungry wolves,  
Baying the stark, snow-carven hills.  
As I poured poison in the flask  
Of rheumatism cure they both set store by  
I figured I'd be strolling down Fifth Avenue  
By Wednesday week. It's easy now  
To see wherein I blundered.  
Had I hit the trail at the revivals  
Making repentance lachrymose and nasal,  
Painting as purple scandal my sad struggle  
To free great powers within me,  
Had I wailed loudly in the mourners' bench,  
Wearing a stodgy hat from Mrs. Puckett's parlors,  
I could have managed murder perfectly.  
This knowledge came too late; so I go down  
With music playing.  
That cigarette of many years ago,  
Its lilac smoke rings  
The flying banners of my self-respect,  
Brought me to the county jail. The people said:  
"A woman who would smoke a cigarette  
Would kill her two old uncles in cold blood."



## *The Lord's Child*

I WAS the Savanarola of Adamant, Missouri,  
A bustling railroad town of some three thousand,  
On the Kaw River. Here in the Bridge Street Church  
God thundered in my voice,  
Flailed in my thrashing arms, turned my dark eyes  
To livid coals.  
The pool halls and the motion picture shows,  
The dances at the Elks' Club,  
And a painted Jezebel of horrid name  
Blew high before my preaching, even as barns and wind-  
mills  
From Kansas cyclones.  
After my sermons women hurried home  
To burn their husbands' cribbage boards,  
To empty vile cider jugs and viler whiskey flasks.  
One talk in which I called a spade a spade  
(Addressed to women only)  
Caused three divorces and no fewer than ten broken  
engagements.  
Here was my secret:  
The fire-tipped words  
Which scotched iniquity, sent maids and matrons

In tear-deluged repentance to my feet,  
 Caught mark from smoldering satanic flames  
 In my own nature. A wise Providence  
 Transformed this baser matter into zeal  
 To lead a holy war against the devil.  
 Thus I swept all before me — cleaned out, root and  
     branch  
 The sin of Adamant.  
 And sat one morning, dreaming of new worlds,  
 Of wilder Babylons,  
 And blacker-souled Gomorrahs.  
 Could I not save the damned  
 Of Omaha, Texarkana, Kalamazoo, Oshkosh, Topeka,  
 And Dubuque — especially Dubuque,  
 In the rich state of Iowa, where live  
 My wife's relations? On bended knee  
 I asked for guidance. As if in answer  
 The door swung open softly and before me,  
 Pink and white, budding,  
 Delicate as a twig of plum blossom,  
 Stood Linda Marsh, just turned eighteen,  
 One of my latest converts.  
 When she stammered her errand  
 About repairing hymn books for the choir,  
 I could not hear her for a crashing voice  
 Beating within me like a thousand cymbals,  
 Saying: "Yield! Yield!  
 How can you hope to pluck lost souls from hell,  
 To wipe out the red Ninevehs  
 Of this great nation,  
 Unless you know, first-hand, the pitchy heart of sin?"  
 She lifted slow, gray eyes, warm-lit

She raised her arms,  
Short-sleeved, lace-ruffled, and brushed back her hair,  
Smiling. I caught her. As she fled  
The kiss I had intended for her mouth  
Trailed off and disappeared under her ear.  
Scarcely could it be called a kiss at all.  
Linda confided in a girl who went dragging the tale to  
    Japhet Marsh,  
A hardware merchant who owned secretly  
A rooming house of which  
I'd made short shrift.  
Japhet was Linda's father.  
He brought suit against me for ten thousand dollars,  
Saying the kiss had wrought precisely so much damage  
To Linda's morals.  
Then began happenings in Adamant  
Like to the scourges of the Trojan wars.  
The town divided in two camps — in one  
The devil's janizaries led by Japhet Marsh.  
In the other  
Women of virtue, a few godly men,  
Myself — and Unseen Hosts.  
My trial opened at the winter term  
Of circuit court; and I preached nightly sermons,  
Baring to the public view sin-reeking lives  
Of well-known citizens opposing me.  
The prairie roads  
Twinkled with autos speeding into town.  
My eloquence emptied three counties.  
The hotels were jammed.  
The streets eddied with crowds,  
Horses, mules, Fords. The papers wrote me up.

I saw my picture on the second page  
Of the Chicago Tribune. Those were great days;  
And God fought by me with a fiery sword.  
Japhet lost out. He had to pay the costs.  
Ten thousand was too much, the jury said,  
For one kiss, under the ear, and given largely  
In a paternal spirit.  
My persecutors thronged the streets that night in murderous mobs.  
Masked men rolled oil barrels against the church.  
The snow-veiled landscape bloomed  
Red like an evil passion.  
As thirsty, scarlet tongues sucked at the very tip of the steeple,  
A woman's figure  
Dropped from the railroad bridge behind the church  
Into the fire-flecked river.

\* \* \*

Back there in Adamant  
Some say Linda drowned herself  
For love of me; and others lay the blame  
On Japhet Marsh, who dragged her through the courts.  
But as for me  
I still see Providence, all-wise, all-loving,  
Bringing forth good from evil.  
Did I not call on God to let me see  
The great State of Iowa?  
To-day I am whizzing through Iowa  
In a neat little roadster  
Canvassing for an illustrated work  
On the white slave traffic. I got the offer only

Because a publisher in East St. Louis  
Learned from the papers  
Of Linda's wet death in the icy river.  
He saw my photograph, read my interviews,  
And being a keen judge of humankind  
He knew he'd found the right man for his job.  
I have nine salesmen working under me,  
I am getting the polish which comes from travel,  
I was at Dubuque and Davenport last week,  
Staying at the best hotels.  
Say, was I ever a country preacher,  
Making six hundred a year?  
I'll have as much as that almost  
From this month's work. Often I pray  
That my strange power with women  
Transmuted with a divine alchemy  
Will sell "The Horrors of the White Slave Traffic"  
To every farmer's wife in Iowa.



## *I Never Did Git to go to Omaha*

I 'VE allays wanted to travel ever since  
Jennie Larkin an' me was little girls  
In school at Sycamore Corners.  
We used to go at night to see the Flyer  
Flash across her father's farm.  
We'd see long rows of lighted cars  
Gleamin' against the dusk  
An' people inside havin' such a lovely time  
Readin,' writin' letters, and talkin';  
Laughin' and eatin';  
All dressed up with nothin' to do  
But travel to the West; an' we said  
When we grew up, we'd go West on the Flyer.  
Well, Jennie got grown an' had a beau.  
He had a ranch left him out near Omaha.  
An' she said when they was married,  
They'd pay my way out there, to visit them.  
How I would have loved to go to Omaha!  
A ridin' out there on the Flyer,  
Eatin' on the diner  
All the way, an' lookin' out the winders  
At coyotes an' wild Injuns,

An' great flat prairies an' whoopin' cowboys.  
But it all fell through.  
Jennie's mother said she'd sooner see her girl  
A-lyin' in her coffin than married  
To any man alive.  
She said she'd cut her throat if Jennie left her,  
So Jennie is an old woman now  
In the Old Ladies' Home,  
An' I never did git to go to Omaha!



## *Such Clean Work!*

ON the car this mornin'  
I heard a woman talkin' —  
She was on her way to make a speech  
On Sir Walter Scott to a woman's club;  
She made her livin' that way, she said.  
Jes' think of it!  
Makin' a livin' givin' talks on authors!  
Such clean work!  
How I wished I'd got some education  
So's't I could make a livin' that way 'stead o'  
Scrubbin' other folk's bathrooms,  
Cleanin' after other folk's parties,  
Washin' after other folk's children —  
But all the education in my family went to Julia,  
My oldest sister. She was the smartest, an' my father said  
He'd educate her an' she could educate  
The rest of us.  
We sold off one of the four cows,  
The speckled heifer,  
To pay her tuition in Miss Willard's seminary.  
Once I walked five white miles in a stingin' blizzard  
To borrow a dollar to send her

When her groceries give out.  
We picked berries all summer an' sold 'em  
To lay up her graduatin' money.  
Well, she graduated,  
But she never taught me anything.  
She jes' set around home an' grieved.  
The boys she would have wouldn't have her,  
An' them that would have her she wouldn't have;  
Finally, she died, an old maid,  
An' I never did git no education!  
Jes' think of it —  
Makin' a livin' givin' talks on authors,  
Such nice, refined work,  
Such clean work!



## *I Pity Them Children!*

WHEN the teacher asked a hard question  
Sally Piper would spit out the answer  
With a stuck-up toss of her red head,  
Which said, plain as words, she thought  
She was better'n the rest of us.  
She went off to Boston to school —  
'Thinkin' Sycamore Corners wa'n't good enough for  
her —  
An' stayed away twenty years teachin' art.  
She earned good money, her folks said,  
But spent it all on clothes.  
Once she came home to visit  
An' walked into the Campbellite Church like some  
queen,  
With her auburn hair wavin' around a new hat  
An' a Easter dress the color of new leaves,  
That must 'a cost a sight,  
And a bunch of violets big as a pint bowl  
Tucked in her girdle; an' big eyes  
That looked far off an' hardly noticed  
Us — that she felt above.  
But she got her come-uppance, did Sally:

The doctors called it a nervous breakdown, but others  
Said she'd been in love on the sly for years  
With Frederick Pinkham Ellingham, Ph.D.,  
The president of the college where she taught,  
A married man with four children.  
Anyway, she had to come back  
To us she hated; to the old farmhouse  
Her father willed her.  
Her brother and his wife was livin' there,  
But after she came she got so hysterical,  
So mean an' threatenin' an' out of her mind,  
That they packed up one night without sayin' nothin'  
An' left her all alone  
In the big house.  
They knew she'd make out somehow  
And the neighbors wouldn't see her starve.  
She got her come-uppance, Sally did,  
For feelin' smarter than the rest of us  
An' better than her folks.  
Now she is boardin' children from the State Home.  
God! I pity them children!



## *The Poet's Wife*

SEEMS queer that I — a sensible woman —  
Married Schiller Browning Hawkins an' spend my life  
Bakin' with green wood I chop myself,  
An' lyin' awake nights figgering how to buy flour  
While Schiller sets around the kitchen,  
Playin' tunes on his fiddle,  
Makin' rhymes for the village paper,  
Dreamin' over colored pictures of Florida orange groves,  
An' follerin' me, when I'm gettin' meals,  
From the cellar to the pantry,  
Readin' Lord Byron's poems from a book.  
This was how it happened:  
When I was keepin' house for my folks,  
An' boardin' Melissa Atkins, the school teacher,  
I was goin' to be married, come spring,  
To Lemuel Jenkins, a good provider,  
And well-fixed. He had twenty thousand  
Spread over the county in mortgages.  
Meliss' was forty-nine; because she couldn't  
Git a man for herself,  
It poisoned her to see Lem an' me  
Settin' up nights,

An' goin' for moonlit sleighrides.  
I knew she was spiteful, but I didn't s'pose  
She'd strike out like a rattler.  
What with housework an' courtin'  
I'd had a tirin' winter and one April day  
When the robins was chirpin' an' the snow was  
meltin'

I saw a novel in Beebe's Drug Store.  
Thinks I: "Next week's house cleanin'."  
I'll let the upstairs sweepin' go a spell  
An' rest an' read." I bought the book — a nice story  
By Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, all about a man and a  
woman

That was wrecked on a desert isle.  
This give Meliss' her chance:  
When from her room above,  
She heard Lem an' me reading aloud in the parlor,  
Spooning and talking soft between the chapters,  
She screamed: "I smell smoke! Something's blazin' in  
the attic! "

We rushed upstairs an' looked around.  
There warn't no fire; but Lem gazed slow  
From the novel in my hand to rolls of dust  
Under the furniture.  
The beds wa'n't made. On the washstand  
Was a comb with hair in it.  
That fixed Lem.  
He said I'd never make him a good wife  
And when I tried  
Explainin', he kept a-hollerin'  
"What I've seen, I've seen! "  
That night when Schiller came to choir practice

I made up to him. I was too broke up  
To look ahead. Sometimes I dream at night  
That I have grabbed Melissa Atkins  
By her long, skinny neck an' choked her  
Till she was dead!

## *A Note on the Type*

IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET



*This book is set on the Linotype in Garamont, a modern rendering of the type first cut in the sixteenth century by Claude Garamond (1510-1561). He was a pupil of Geofroy Tory and is believed to have based his letters on the Venetian models although he introduced a number of important differences, and it is to him we owe the letter which we know as Old Style. He gave to his letters a certain elegance and a feeling of movement which won for their creator immediate reputation and the patronage of the French King, Francis I.*



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Kimball, Alice Mary

PS  
3521  
.I 42  
D4  
1929

The devil is a woman

PS  
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The devil is a woman

